

THE LIGHTER SIDE
OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

By the same Author

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
SPEAKING AFTER DINNER
MEN, WOMEN AND MARRIAGE
A.R.P. AND ALL THAT
THE PARISH PUMP
THE ABC OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
NECTAR IN A NUTSHELL
AMBROSIA BY REQUEST

THE LIGHTER SIDE
OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

by

C. KENT WRIGHT, B.A.(Oxon.)

Town Clerk of Stoke Newington

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

by JOHN REYNOLDS

Therefore, in this modern conflict between the Smile and the Laugh, I am all in favour of laughing. Laughter has something in it in common with the ancient winds of faith and inspiration; it unfreezes pride and unwinds secrecy; it makes men forget themselves in the presence of something greater than themselves; something (as the common phrase goes about a joke) that they cannot resist.

G. K. CHESTERTON

LONDON

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

MUSEUM STREET

FIRST PUBLISHED 1935
SECOND IMPRESSION 1935
THIRD IMPRESSION 1948

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
JARROLD AND SONS LTD. THE EMPIRE PRESS
NORWICH

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INTRODUCTION

HUMOUR is the lubricant of the wheels of life. It costs nothing but achieves much.

Such a lubricant is particularly helpful in the routine work of local authorities, which is not usually of the liveliest character, ranging as it does from housing to hospitals, from land drainage to lunacy, from bake-houses to bandstands, and from cellar dwellings to cemeteries. Just as the comments or questions of a judge relieve the tension of a Court of Law, so an unexpected repartee, a slip of the tongue, or a quaintly worded letter may brighten the usually sedate and serious atmosphere of Council Chamber or Committee Room.

I wish to disclaim at the outset any desire to satirize either the elected representatives or the officers of local authorities. If the good humour which prevails at most Committee and Council Meetings is any criterion, I feel sure that members of local authorities will appreciate this collection of amusing incidents relating to local government and administration, and will acquit me of any desire to make fun at their expense.

In addition to its primary object of showing that local government is not so dull as it sounds, I hope that my book may also fulfil a more serious purpose—that of illustrating the difficulty which confronts most people engaged in the work of local government—the

difficulty of meeting the criticism of such members of the *laissez-faire* school as Sir Ernest Benn, who continually deplore the increasing interference of State and local authority in the private life of the individual, and the equally vehement complaints of other sections of the community who think that the powers of local authorities are not wide enough.

For example, here is an extract from a number of the now defunct *Independent*:

"There are even among independent readers those who have continued to think that the erection of a score or a thousand houses did, in fact, relieve the housing congestion. Our special number has done a great deal to remove this misapprehension and to help still more of our readers to comprehend the deep difficult truth that *in social movements, the best way to get things done is generally to do nothing.*"

On the other hand, as will be seen from some of the letters included in my book, local authorities are constantly being inundated with requests to do things which they have no power to do.

Another thing worthy of note is that in spite of the way in which local government affects our lives at every end and turn, the great majority of people are utterly ignorant as to its workings and machinery. I often recall with mingled feelings of amusement and annoyance the remark of a lady whose guest I was at a dinner some time ago. "I have often," she said, "wondered what a Town Clerk actually does—I *know* he has something to do with dustbins!"

It is encouraging to know that many schools are taking a much more serious interest than they have done in the past in the teaching of civics. For example, the Pannall Ash School near Harrogate has recently arranged to organize itself on the model of the working of a local authority. It is an interesting experiment, and it is possible that other schools may follow suit.

I once thought that I would reserve the compilation of this book as a hobby for my retirement. Looking back in 1965 with a calm and dispassionate gaze on the last forty years of my life, I would select, I thought, all the incidents which had enlivened the somewhat drab arena of local government—its committees, councils, conferences, and ceremonies. The petty, annoying, irksome incidents would be forgotten; the pleasant and amusing ones remembered.

Two things have been responsible for the earlier publication of this little book. In the first place I reflected that, if I waited until 1965, any sense of fun I still possess might by then have become completely atrophied. Secondly, 1935—the centenary year of local government—seemed an appropriate time to supplement the many serious books on municipal work, which it will doubtless bring forth, with something in lighter vein.

Local government is an essential part of our national life, and it is a commonplace that local government administration in this country is finely and efficiently carried out. The elected representative, actuated by a sense of public duty, sacrifices his leisure for the

benefit of his fellow-citizens, and the official is usually courteous, efficient, and helpful, and does not, as some people believe, occupy a well-paid sinecure.

But it will do them no harm to enjoy a joke at their own expense. The ability to laugh at oneself is one of the highest of human attainments.

This collection of stories, letters, and incidents is intended primarily for elected members and officials of local authorities. Some of the incidents may perhaps be useful for after-dinner speeches—"to point a moral or adorn a tale!" But I hope that my book may be read by other people who do not concern themselves with municipal affairs.

It would be an impossible task to mention individually everyone who has helped me in the compilation of this book. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking all those who responded to my appeals for humorous incidents and letters for inclusion in my book, and in particular to the Town Clerk of Wandsworth (Mr. R. H. Jerman, M.C., M.A.) for assisting me to circularize the members of the Society of Town Clerks; to the Secretary of the Institute of Municipal Treasurers and Accountants (Mr. Garrat-Holden), the Hon. Secretary of the Association of Chief Public Health Clerks (Mr. A. H. Gibb), for their similar services in respect of their Associations. I also wish to thank Mr. L. Hill, Secretary of the National Association of Local Government Officers, for making several valuable suggestions; Mr. S.

Wolton for an excellent collection of stories relating particularly to audit and auditors; Mr. E. H. Rhodes for a "leavening" of Ministry of Health anecdotes; Mr. Gerald Barry for giving me permission to reprint certain extracts from *This England*; the editor of *The Countryman* (Mr. J. W. Robertson Scott) for giving me permission to reprint numerous extracts from his wonderful little quarterly magazine; Mr. J. H. Thomas, the author of that intensely interesting book *Town Government in the Sixteenth Century*, and Messrs. George Allen & Unwin for allowing me to reprint numerous extracts from that book; the Cambridge University Press, Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., and Messrs. Constable & Co. for similar permission in respect of *Small Talk at Wreyland*, *A City Council from Within*, and *The Bureaucrats*, respectively; Lady Simon for allowing me to quote her suggested examination paper in the practice of administration; Alderman Tweedy Smith for allowing me to reprint a letter from his book *Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors*, and in addition for placing his own amusing collection of local government stories at my disposal; Col. R. J. Blackham for allowing me to quote from *London for ever the Sovereign City*; Mr. L. Welsh, editor of *London Town*, the staff journal of the London County Council; and last but not least the proprietors of *Punch* for allowing me to reprint A. P. Herbert's amusing skit *Mr. Dough's Diary*.

I find it hard to express my sense of obligation to all these and to the many other friends and helpers

who have made the publication of this book possible. Lastly, I want to thank Mr. John Reynolds, whose illustrations of *1066 and all that* and *Horse Nonsense* are already known to thousands of readers, for so kindly consenting to illustrate my book.

C. K. W.

March 1935

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER I

HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR

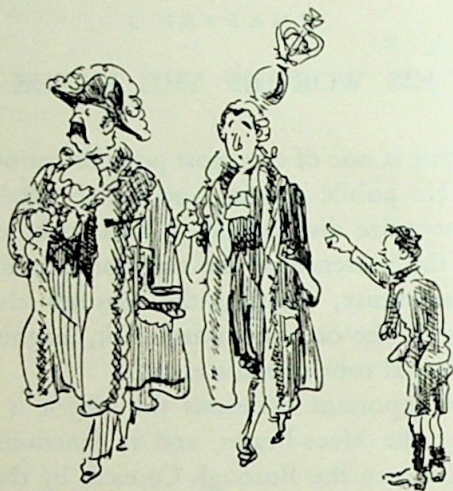
THE Mayor is one of our most popular national institutions. No public meeting, no social gathering, no bazaar, no prize distribution is held to be complete without the presence of the ceremonial head of the local community, wearing the mayoral chain and badge, or, if the occasion warrants it, magnificent in the traditional robe of red and sable.

On all important occasions the Mayor is accompanied by the Mace-bearer, and at functions which directly concern the Borough Council, by the Town Clerk, wearing wig and gown. But whereas the crowd invariably recognize the Mayor, they do not always accord similar recognition to the Town Clerk. At an Armistice Day Service recently, one urchin was heard to remark excitedly: "Look, 'ere comes the Lord Mayor, an' 'e's got a judge with 'im!"

The particular Mayor on this occasion was not, in fact, a Lord Mayor. Only sixteen cities in the British Isles can boast of a Lord Mayor.

Up to the time of the Norman Conquest, the chief officers of English boroughs were the reeves, some-

times called port-reeves, from Saxon words signifying the chief governor of a harbour. In Henry II's reign, when municipal life was developing rapidly, the Norman title *maire* (which soon afterwards became mayor) was brought into use.



"LOOK, 'ERE COMES THE LORD MAYOR . . ."

At first the Mayor was chosen for life, but afterwards for periods of irregular duration. He is now elected annually on November 9th by the Council of the borough from among the aldermen or councillors or persons qualified to be aldermen or councillors.

The Mayor presides at the meetings of the Council, and is also *ex officio* a member of all the committees of the Council, which are the real workshops of local government.

There is a story of one Mayor who was anxious to

make it clear that he would display no favouritism during his year of office, and who concluded his speech to the Council after his election with the following peroration: “. . . and I shall endeavour during the forthcoming year to hold evenly the scales of justice, veering neither to partiality on the one hand nor to impartiality on the other.”

Many amusing illustrations of the manifold duties incumbent upon a Mayor can be extracted from ancient municipal records. He was expected to keep open house during his period of office, and was often paid a salary to enable him to do so.

“When in 1535 Robert Alanson, a poor but popular man, was elected Mayor of Lincoln, the Council granted him ‘a tun of wine or £4 to buy it with . . . for he has many acquaintances and much resort is likely to put him to great cost.’ In 1545 the Council decided ‘to pay the late Mayor the usual allowance, although he and his wife did not use such house-keeping nor wear such apprell (apparel) as they ought. . . .’

“‘The expenses have grown four times as much in forty years,’ say the *Chester Records*. In spite of the increasing charges it was thought to reflect on the credit of the town if one of the higher officials failed to live in a manner becoming to his high office, and at Ipswich a bailiff had to pay £5 ‘for not keeping hospitality according to the custom. . . .’

“The officials were expected to maintain a high standard of conduct. A vigorous protest was raised

against the Mayor of Canterbury becoming a brewer at the end of his year of office, 'other persons after being Mayor had lived like gentlemen.' At Beverley the Mayor was not to enter a public-house during his term of office. At Chester, Alderman Ball was fined for carrying ale on a Sunday, and later the Mayor was



"NOT KEEPING HOSPITALITY ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM"

fined for selling ale and victuals. By a Statute enacted in 1512, if the Mayor-elect was engaged in a victualling trade, then two persons had to be elected to act in his stead as Clerk of the Market, and this was done at Leicester in 1595, 'because the Mayor's wife is a brewer.' At Coventry, no food-dealers were allowed to sit on the Council.

"Chester had considerable trouble when installing its water supply. In 1575 the Mayor brought a man from London and the Council decided to employ him for the work. A month later an agreement was made by which 'Peter Morris contracts to bring a sufficient

conduit from that well (St. Giles' Well) in leaden pipes—as big and strong as the Mayor appoints—and bring the same to the Cross at the Parish Church or as near as the Mayor shall decide.’

“In the market the Mayor reigned supreme. Here, as ‘Clerk of the Market’ and the representative of the Crown, he declared the ‘Assize’ or price at which controlled goods could be sold, and on him rested the responsibility of maintaining every condition that made for good market.

“Since the control of prices, quality, and measure was vested in the Mayor, it was essential that an impartial man should be chosen. The laws forbade a ‘victualler’ to act as Clerk of the Market, and as this regulation would have prevented many people from holding the office of Mayor, it was arranged that during a victualler’s term of office other people should be responsible for these duties. So at Lincoln ‘Two persons were elected assistants to the Mayor for the pricing of victuals according to the Statute, because the Mayor himself is a victualler.’

“The conduct of the Clerk of the Market was very seldom the subject of complaint, but when he was at fault the Leet Jury did not hesitate to say so. At Nottingham the Mayor was ‘presented’ for selling herring in the market, ‘being not able when that he is Clerk of the Market,’ and with excluding others that would have sold ‘as good stuff to the town, much cheaper.’ ”¹

¹ *Town Government in the Sixteenth Century.*

The following is an extract from old records of the Borough of Portsmouth, dated September 5, 1682.

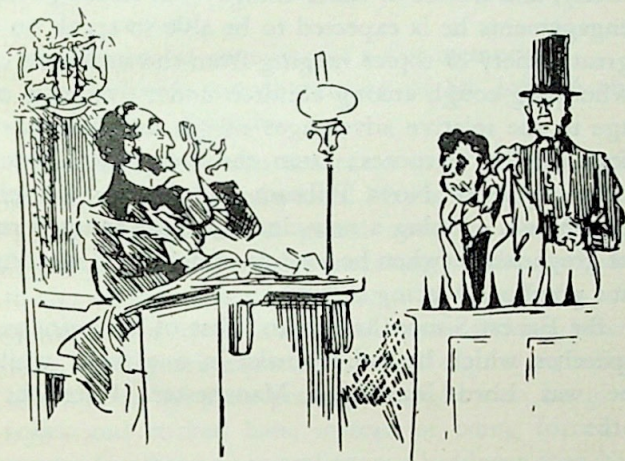
"We due ordaine and appoint that every Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the said Borough for the tyme being shall for ever hereafter not walke without his house into the towne without carrying of a white staffe in his hand between six and seaven foot in length and an inch and a halfe in circumference, or else to weare his gowne, upon the forfeiture of Two Shillings and Sixpence (to the use of the Corporation) for every default that shall be made therein."

In the City of London the Lord Mayor must be an Alderman and must have previously held the office of Sheriff. Year by year the Lord Mayor issues a precept to the various City Companies summoning the Livery to Guildhall to elect a Lord Mayor for the ensuing year. Ever since the days of Whittington the ceremony has been preceded by a religious service which in pre-Reformation times was a Solemn Mass. The Lord Mayor, aldermen, and all taking part in the procession carry little nosegays, and the Husting itself is strewn with sweet-smelling herbs—a curious custom originally designed to protect the exalted participants in this old ceremony from "plague and fever."

The following is an extract from Mr. Cecil Torr's entertaining little book *Small Talk at Wreyland*, which contains a great deal of information about local government in the County of Devon during the last century:

"Writing from Exeter, 23rd October 1838, my father says, 'I went to hear the Mayor preach on Sun-

day evening; he had an immense audience and spoke for about an hour and a half. He holds up the Bible alone as the sole necessary book, condemns every creed and article framed by men, calls every system of religion in the world a money-getting system, etc.



etc.' My father kept a copy of some verses on the Mayor, which were very popular in Exeter just then, especially the lines

'On Saturday sells gin to all,
preaches Sunday,
and on Monday
sitting in judgment in the Hall
inflicts the fine for fight or fray
caused by the gin of Saturday.' "

To-day a Mayor is expected to be a veritable Admirable Crichton. Not only must he be acquainted with the highly diversified work of the Council's Committees—relating, as it does, to Public Health, Highways, Rating and Finance, Gas, Water, Electricity, and a host of other things—but in his public engagements he is expected to be able to speak on a great variety of topics ranging from the incidence of whooping-cough among children under five years of age to the relative advantages of gas and electricity for cooking purposes; from the comparative box-office value of Nova Pilbeam and Shirley Temple (when he is opening a new cinema) to the racing form of greyhounds (when he attends some special meeting at a greyhound racing stadium).

Sir Ernest Simon has given a list of the principal speeches which he had to make in one week while he was Lord Mayor of Manchester. Here they are:

1. Welcome the Anglo-Catholic Conference to Manchester.
2. Address a synagogue congregation on Atonement Day.
3. Address the annual reunion of the largest Sunday School in the world at Stockport.
4. A speech on Canada at a Rotary Club dinner.
5. The Manchester Medical Society Annual Dinner: "Why Manchester ought to have the best Medical School in England."

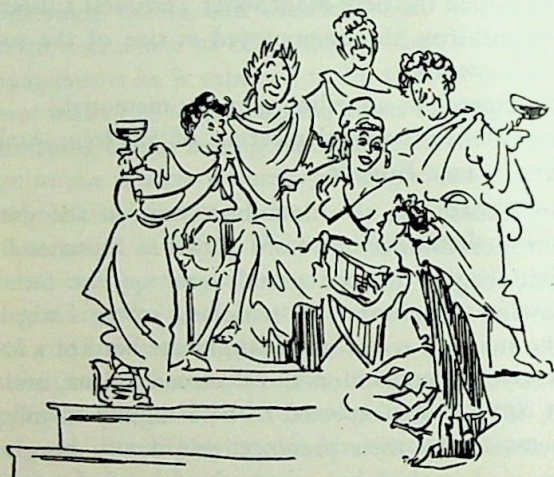
6. A reception to the Manchester musical world: "Manchester and Music."
7. Two speeches on "The Art of the Theatre" at lunch, and at an exhibition afterwards.
8. Open the new Manchester Technical Library.
9. Address the unemployed at one of the social centres.
10. Speech at unveiling of a war memorial.
11. Welcome annual meeting of St. John Ambulance Brigade.

Sir Ernest has also described some of the duties and responsibilities of a Lord Mayor of Manchester:

"He begins on the grand scale on the Sunday following his election by marching to the Cathedral in the mayoral robes and chain at the head of a long procession of councillors and aldermen and magistrates who, if they are expected to lend dignity to official ceremonies by their presence, might also be given robes and cocked hats, instead of being forced to appear in whatever miscellaneous headgear they happen to possess, ranging usually from top hats through bowlers and felt hats to cloth caps! His next duty is to arrange for and preside at the great gathering of over fifty thousand citizens at the very impressive Armistice Day Service in Albert Square. Then he settles down to a steady routine; welcomes to conferences, lunches, teas, dinners, receptions, and meetings of every kind, marked by only one common feature: a speech by the Lord Mayor."

S S S

It is not surprising, therefore, that Mayors are guilty of occasional solecisms and slips of the tongue, like the Mayor who expressed alarm at the increased local expenditure of his Council by saying: "Gentle-



"... LIKE CAESAR'S WIFE ..."

men, the rates of this town are creeping up by leaps and bounds."



In the remaining part of this chapter I propose to arrange a collection of stories about Mayors which have been sent to me by correspondents (including both elected representatives and officials) from all parts of the country.

Here is a story told by Sir Frank Lockwood about a Yorkshire Mayor:

"In proposing his health at the first Mayoral banquet, a citizen expressed the belief that His Worship's term of office would be marked by unfailing and unvaried fairness and justice. Liberal or Conservative, which ever he might be, no trace of party prejudice would be found in his public conduct. 'I thank my friend for his kind remarks,' said the Mayor, in response. 'I believe you will find that I shall not disappoint his expectations. I feel and know that a Mayor should be, like Caesar's wife, all things to all men.'"



A certain Mayor had risen in the world. He had started as an errand-boy at the early age of ten, and now at forty—and a bit—he found himself not only the richest tradesman in the town but an Alderman, and, what is more, it wanted only a week until the day when he was to be inducted into his new office as Mayor.

He was fond of show, and therefore made up his mind that several big functions in which he was to be the chief figure should mark the day. First among these was the review, by the Mayor, of course, of the local fire brigade.

"Fine weather I must have," he said to himself, and promptly sent the following notice to the local newspaper:

"On the occasion of the induction of the new

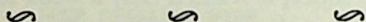
Mayor the fire brigade will be reviewed in the afternoon if it is wet in the morning, and in the morning if wet in the afternoon."



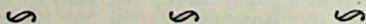
A Mayor visited a school for the prize-giving. After the event, some refreshments were served in the headmistress's room, and the Mayor was seated in a chair which was rather low. The Mayor was old, so that when he wished to rise he found some difficulty in doing so. Some of the girls had been busy handing round refreshments to the guests, and one, who was rather small for her age, seeing his plight, came up and said, "Can I help you, sir?"

"That is very kind of you," said His Worship, "but you are only a little girl; are you strong enough?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "I have often helped my father when he was much drunker than you are."



A Mayor was officiating at a Council Meeting. A very agile member of the Labour Party was constantly interrupting when the Mayor was on his feet. The Mayor interposed, "Let one fool speak at a time." The Labour member at once replied, "Certainly. Go on, then."



MAYOR (*reading prepared speech*): "This brings us to the—er—um—m—"

TOWN CLERK (*prompting*): "Crux of the matter."

MAYOR (*in a stage whisper*): "Crux? What do 'ee mean by crux? Do 'ee mean guts?"

S S S

A self-made Mayor with his Mayoress, showing with great pride some distinguished visitors over the new Town Hall, was asked, "And are the acoustics good?" The worthy Mayor was at first a bit taken aback by the question, but rallying nobly, said: "Oh yes, my Lord, perfect; me and my missus 'as been into every corner of this 'ere building and we couldn't find a stink anywhere."

S S S

Several stories are current about the confusion of the words "morality" and "mayoralty." Possibly several mayors have received telegrams couched in such terms as: "Congratulations and best wishes for a successful year of morality."

A self-made Mayor, anxious to inform his successor that the office he was about to take on was no sinecure, said: "The duties of the morality are very onious."

Another Councillor, upon being installed in the office of Mayor, made the following remarkable declaration: "Gentlemen, I am taking upon myself the morality for the first time."

S S S

A modest disavowal was made by one Mayor in responding to a vote of thanks for opening a sale of work. "I don't require or expect your thanks," he said, beaming affably at his audience, "for it is understood that during his year of office a Mayor is a public convenience."



Lord Lytton had been addressing a meeting of the League of Nations Union in — and had stressed the point of working for the *Equality* of Nations.

The Mayor, proposing a vote of thanks, said: "I am sure we are all very interested in what the speaker has 'ad to tell us; and we shall go away from 'ere determined to push this old country to the front for all we're worth!"



A man was driving a donkey with a cart full of pots. On his way he met a rough-looking customer who offered him five shillings for the privilege of whispering in the donkey's ear. The bargain was concluded, and the man whispered in the donkey's ear with the surprising result that the donkey kicked the cart to pieces and smashed the pots. An action was brought by the driver to recover damages. The Mayor of B——, who tried the case, could make nothing of it, and the plaintiff was non-suited. The following day the Mayor happened to meet the man who possessed such occult powers over donkeys.

"Oh," said the Mayor, "that was a curious case yesterday; 'whatever did you say to the donkey to make him kick the cart to pieces?'"

"I shall not tell you; it's a saycret," replied the man.

"Come, come; it's of no consequence now the case is dismissed."

"No; it's a saycret," still replied the man.

But the Mayor persisted, till at length, with apparent reluctance, the man yielded.

"Well, I'll tell you, but you must tell nobody else, because it's a saycret. I said 'Hi, do you know that your brother is Mayor of B——?'"

N.B.—The astonishing effect of the whisper was produced by the hot ash from the end of a cigar which the man was smoking.



Another part of a Mayor's duties is the answering of innumerable letters.

A Mayor was asked what were the two qualifications necessary to be Mayor. His reply: "First to suffer fools gladly, and second to answer letters by return of post."

I do not suppose that the average number of letters received by Mayors approximates in number, say, to the "fan mail" of a cinema star. But I should imagine that the subject-matter of the letters received by a Mayor is infinitely wider.

The Mayor's advice is sought and his help invoked in every conceivable way, and he is "supposed by

many to be a reference library, by others a sort of deity who can put everything right if he only will."

The following are examples cited by Sir Ernest Simon of requests which he received by letter while he was Lord Mayor of Manchester:

"Is it true that a bridge in Manchester collapsed owing to sympathetic vibration with marching of troops? Sender encloses four United States cent stamps for reply."

"Will you at once do something to stop mud splashing from motor-cars?"

"Will you found a Repertory Theatre and a Municipal Opera House, and arrange popular Sunday Concerts?"

"Will you take up some patent furnace to abate the smoke nuisance?"

"Will you advise applicant whether he has small-pox?"

"Will you provide a wife in whom character is more important than beauty and a dowry more important than either?"

In addition, all kinds of cranks and eccentrics regard the Mayor's letter-box as a proper receptacle for an expression of their grievances or delusions—as the following letter will show:

"To the Mayor of Southend-on-Sea.

There is in Chalkwell Ward, a woman who was brought in in a great hurry early to-day. The Doctor cannot find anything the matter with her. If the X-ray

was used, it would be seen that she has sometime swallowed the embryo of an uncooked egg. This has matured in her inside and the little deformity is preying on her bowels—the fright and worry of which she cannot understand—is simply sending her into frantic fits of hysteria. If this is neglected she will die from infection from the excreta of the living creature within her, as happened to a man sometime back. The Mayor is implored to lose not one minute in attending to the matter. The woman's life is given into his hands, and God will demand it of him at the Judgment Day."

As I have already said, a Mayor's life is no sinecure!



My last mayoral anecdote is about a certain Lord Mayor who was famous, while he lived, for his constant use of the expression "this here" and "that there." When he died, someone suggested these lines as his epitaph:

"Here lies our worthy Lord Mayor:

He has left 'this here' world and gone to 'that there'."



CHAPTER II

ALDERMEN AND COUNCILLORS

IN Anglo-Saxon times earls, governors of provinces, and other persons of distinction received the title of *Ealdormann* (in Latin, *Aldermannus*). Thus we read of the *Aldermannus totius Angliae*, the *Aldermannus regis* (probably an occasional magistrate corresponding to the modern Justice of Assize), and *Aldermannus comitatus*, a magistrate who sat at the trial of causes with the bishop, and laid down the Common Law, while the Bishop confined himself to adjudicating on matters affected by ecclesiastical law. In addition, we find such titles as *Aldermannus civitatis, burgi, castelli, bundredi, sive wapentachii*, etc.

So that the title Alderman is even more ancient than that of Mayor.

To-day our Alderman is the holder of an office in the Municipal Corporations and County Councils of England and Wales, and in the Municipal Corporations of Ireland and the United States.

Aldermen are elected by the Councillors, either from among themselves or from persons who are qualified to be Councillors, for six years, one-half going out every three years. (Councillors are elected for three years.)

The number of Councillors in each Local Authority varies according to its size. In Municipal Boroughs

and County Councils the number of Aldermen is one-third of the number of Councillors, except in London, where it is one-sixth.

So that the schoolboy's definition of an Alderman as "a kind of superior Councillor" holds good. The Alderman holds office for twice as long as a Councillor; he usually sits at a special "Aldermanic Bench" in the Council Chamber; and in most Councils he wears a special Alderman's robe. But for the rest, his work and duties are precisely the same as those of a Councillor.

All this does not apply to the Corporation of the City of London, which was not included in the Borough Reform Act. There the Court of Aldermen consists of twenty-six, twenty-five of whom are elected for life by the Freeman of the respective Wards. The City is divided into twenty-six Wards; twenty-four of these send up one Alderman each, the other two combine to choose a twenty-fifth. The twenty-sixth Alderman serves for the Metropolitan Borough of Southwark, and is appointed by the Aldermen, who generally select the senior from among themselves when a vacancy occurs.

It all sounds very complicated, and is so.

That is the penalty for the City's having stuck out for its ancient privileges, and so having successfully resisted the tide of progress.

The qualifications for membership of the City Council are now laid down by Statute, but in addition the ancient customary qualification remains which entitles any person to be elected a Common Council-

man who is a Freeman householder in the Ward, namely a person who, being free of the City, is rated for a house "paying scot and bearing lot."

"Scot and lot" was a contribution on all subjects according to their ability to pay. "Scot" means tribute or tax, and "lot" the portion allotted to the individual. To pay scot is to pay the ordinary tax, and to bear lot is to pay the personal contribution demanded from each Freeman by the State—in short, to share the pecuniary burdens of the City.

It is frequently asked why so many people can be found to give up their time and voluntary service to the work of local government. Attendance at Committee and Council Meetings takes up a great deal of time, and often the elected representative gets blame rather than praise from the public at large. Perhaps the main motive, apart from a sense of citizenship and a desire to look after the welfare of their town and its inhabitants, is the feeling of dignity and power which accompanies the holding of these offices.

It was the same in "the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth." "At Oxford," to quote again from *Town Government in the Sixteenth Century*, "the social advantages gained by holding a civic position were so valued that those who paid their fine for refusing to serve claimed the right to take their place in civic functions just as if they had actually been in office. So 'Henry Willmot has paid his fine for refusing office as Alderman, is allowed to take his position in civic processions.' This privilege was also extended to his

wife, for it was usual for wives of Councillors and officials to take their part in civic displays. The records show that disputes arose as to precedence, 'to the inquietude of their husbands as well as the residue of the company,' and many Councils had regulations specifying the position each woman should occupy, though often the wives of Councillors were



simply ordered 'to follow the order of going out one after another according to the ancientre of their husbands.' "

To go forward three hundred years or so, here is an extract from *London for ever the Sovereign City* relating to the nefarious activities of a certain City Alderman. "The irregularities with regard to mismanagement of the Walbrook Ward Fund by Alderman Atkins were surpassed in the days of his successor, Michael Gibbs, who, as Treasurer of the Ward Schools and Churchwarden of St. Stephen's, seems to have made some errors in accountancy.

"The upshot was a public scandal, and *Punch* came out with the following: 'From hence the 28th of September, 1844, ought to be marked down as a day of fasting and humiliation in the Civic Calendar. Gibbs has been elected Mayor, a result that like the funds of St. Stephen Walbrook, there appears to be no accounting for.'"

Later on some verses were inserted by a parishioner of St. Stephen Walbrook, which ran as follows:

"Last night an awful rumour came over Walbrook
way,
And we heard our fine old Alderman the balance
meant to pay;
The Vestry hoped it might be so, but nought could
we hear
To give us hope we should be out of Chancery
this year.
All night we talked it over, we could not go to
sleep,
And this morning all through Walbrook on Gibbs
our eyes we keep.
He rides along the Aldermen, his gay gown
streaming free,
But we fear that we may whistle, ere the balance
we shall see."

Punch gives an account of the Alderman's Inaugural Banquet as Lord Mayor, at the conclusion of which "The Lord Mayor returned thanks in an affecting speech. He said among other things that being in-

trusted as Lord Mayor with the civic scales of justice, he felt he should be quite happy so long as the Balance remained in his hands."

The last extract is entitled *The Gibbs Safety Lock*. "The Church of St. Stephen Walbrook is open at the roof, also three of its windows, 'any burglar,' says a parishioner, 'could break in with the greatest ease. We recommend the Parish to solicit Alderman Gibbs to cover up the apertures with his Churchwarden's accounts, as no one has ever been known yet to get through them.'"

But let us return to the twentieth century.

Councillors are elected from particular Wards. They are expected to look after the particular interests of their own Wards, and to be the mouthpieces of the electors for any grievances or complaints which may arise.

That Aldermen and Councillors are not exempt, any more than Mayors, from the worries of correspondence can be seen from the following letters which have been received by Councillors:

"Pardon me, Madam, but I'd like to suggest a drinking-fountain for the Cemetery, and another convenience for ladies, and so placed in such a part of the Cemetery where there'd be no mistake made. Only the other day, 'tis sad to relate, an old lady appealed to me in great distress. Another was thirsty and tired thro' trying to find the headstone of a beloved one then resting in the grave. Of course I

know not what your arrangements may be, but I think when a Cemetery is patronized by people that one good turn deserves another.

With best respects,

Dum spiro spero.

To a Lady Councillor, Town Hall."

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"To the Corporation of —.

Dear Sirs,

Re Loan No. — I am taking herewith the liberty to inquire if you could give me any advice regarding the following:

My neighbour, Mr. —, occupying No. —, has lately been driving nails into my fence to give support to his plants.

When told by me not to do so as he damages the fragile fence he threatened me to drive one nail into me and one into my wife. As I have to keep the property in good repair according to the deeds, I should be glad to know what attitude to adopt.

Thanking you in anticipation, I remain, dear Sirs,
Yours faithfully."

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"Dear Sirs,

Our ceiling has fallen down.

Yours thankfully,

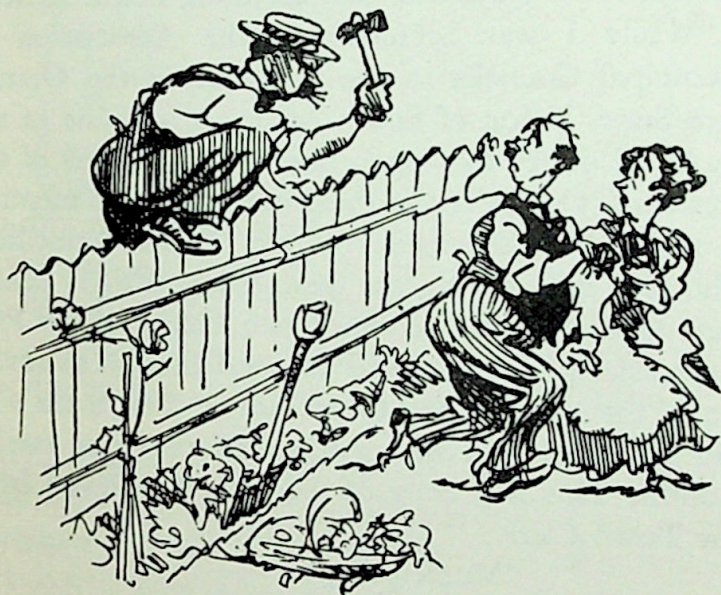
Mrs. —"

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Here is a rather uncomplimentary story about Town Councillors. It was sent to me by an Alderman, so I have no scruples about printing it. Like Scotsmen and Jews, many Aldermen and Councillors seem rather to enjoy stories against themselves :



“ . . . TO DRIVE ONE NAIL INTO ME . . . ”

“Gornal, a village in South Staffordshire, was at one time famous for its donkeys. In those days the inhabitants used to travel about the country selling ‘lily whoite sand’ for cleaning purposes.

“One day a Wolverhampton Town Councillor said to a Gornal woman, ‘Missus, whatever do you do with all your donkeys at Gornal?’

“‘Well,’ replied the Gornal woman, with the usual

nasal drawl, 'we uses 'em as long as we can to carry lily whoite sand, and then we sends 'em into Wolverhampton to mak' Town Councillors on 'em.' "

The following story was sent to me by a local government official of the City of Capetown, South Africa:

"While I was Secretary to the Association of Municipal Councils in the Province of the Orange Free State, Union of South Africa, it was one of my unofficial duties to prepare the annual address of the President. One year the President wished to mention in his address the names of any Town Councillors who had died during the year. I accordingly sent a confidential circular to the Town Clerks of the Province asking if they would be good enough to advise me of the name of any Councillor in their town who had departed this life within the previous twelve months. This is a copy of the reply I received from one Town Clerk:

'Municipality of ———.

Secretary, O.F.S. Municipal Association,
Kroonstad.

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter of the 24th inst. I regret to inform you that none of my Councillors or ex-Councillors have died since last Congress.

Yours faithfully,

_____,
Town Clerk.' "

You remember Browning's famous description of the deputation to the Town Council of Hamelin on the urgent problem of rats:

"At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
'Tis clear,' cried they, 'our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation—shocking.
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease.
Rouse up, Sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as Fate, we'll send you packing!'"

Well, Local Councils to-day still receive complaints on all kinds of questions (including rats), although the speeches of the delegates are usually couched in more polite language and the whole business conducted with more formal dignity and ceremony than was apparently the case at Hamelin Town.

Here, for example, are three letters in which humour and pathos are mixed, on the very subject which tried and tormented the townspeople of Hamelin:

"Dear Sir,

I very much regret to worry you, but you are probably aware that I have been forced from time to

time to complain about the number of rats that have been causing us great distress here. I got a big dog to try to keep the rats away, who to my great annoyance has ripped up many articles of my furniture, he cost me a considerable amount in my children's shoes, new ones, three pairs in one week that he ripped up, and I have now got rid of him. These rats over a prolonged period become extremely nerve-racking.

Apart from continually seeing these rats, which are of the most impudent kind I have experienced—(I served in the Army as an Infantry man actually in the trenches for two whole years, so you may be sure I am not fussy, and you may be sure I know what rats are)—but here I see them in the day when there is noise going on, as well as at night. I have on many occasions seen as many as three rats, big ones, on the pipe over the sink. As I say, apart from minor incidents of that sort, the servant girl says one actually flew at her. I did not feel inclined to believe her, until yesterday afternoon I actually saw, with my own eyes, whilst I was actually sitting on the lavatory seat, a filthy big rat actually run between my legs, whilst I was in a position not too easy to defend myself. I tried to stamp on it, but of course missed it. And, although as you may be sure I am not easily alarmed, it put my nerves so on edge that I had to get out of the lavatory as soon as I could. I have never been to the kitchen without hearing them running about like cart horses behind the partition, but that did not

worry me so much until as I say one actually ran between my legs.

I beg to remain, Sir,

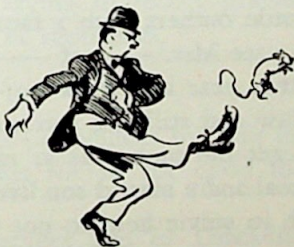
Yours faithfully."



"On the 12th February, I complained of the presence of a dead rat in this road, and the repeated presence of these offensive creatures which had, from time to time, even penetrated the house.

Additionally, to-day, can be seen an old sheep's skull, a soaked loaf of bread and numerous etc's.

Perhaps you will kindly give this matter your attention."



"Sir,

At midnight, last night, a gentleman kicked and killed a rat which appeared to come from an empty house at Number 55 in this road. The thing has been laying in the gutter all day. Can it be cleared early, please.

The presence of these rodents in this road has become rather disturbing for they have occasionally penetrated into houses as far as the top floors. I had to draw attention to such an instance in this house nearly three years ago. I am glad to say there has been no repetition here but other neighbours have had similar experiences.

Sorry for the necessity of troubling you.

Yours faithfully."



And here is another letter (in which one can detect a trace of Mr. James Joyce's style) complaining about the unfair apportionment of Public Assistance:

"Sir how is it that a man with a famley as to meet all rait and stile outhers with 2 famley living in one pay none as i see Mrs. — of — as now not pay any for over 4 year and draw 10/- shilind a week from poor law and still one son working in the pit and singley get the money as ar man with childrin and alloud coal and a marrid son live with her as well and a daugh in servic help to not wonder they can drink and go to pictors i think it is time some one enquir as the riate is it is out of rinson for one not to get a enuf food and unter pay not of course they have been out on strick so as a married man with not room for to keep lodgers to help him to pay hoping some one will wake up and treet all alike and then there is 2 famley in — Street pay nond no wonder

wiom children suffer now as they have go with out for to meet such as thoes."

S S S

Upon the occasion of a deputation to the then Local Government Board respecting some matter connected with a Parish Council, one of the permanent officials, in reply to a question as to what generally were the duties of a Parish Council, replied, "Well, I think it might be said that they are empowered to generally potter about."

Your modern Councillor has to do much more than "potter about." Not only does he take a keen interest in the multifarious duties performed by his Council, but he spends a considerable amount of his time in listening to and trying to rectify grievances of the ratepayers whom he represents.

S S S

Aldermen—and Councillors for that matter—have a reputed fondness for all the good things of the table.

You may remember that in Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*, when Mr. Gray conveys to his wife the astounding information that he has asked Mr. Goldmore to dinner, she cries in dismay:

"Goodness gracious! What *can* we give him for dinner? He has two French cooks—you know Mrs. Goldmore is always telling us about them—and he dines with Aldermen every day."

At Colchester the Borough Council own the oyster beds, and everyone has read of—a few lucky ones have participated in—the annual Oyster Feast. After the feast it is customary for distinguished guests to propose various toasts and pay their tribute to “the succulent bi-valve.” (I am told that at no Col-



chester Oyster Feast within living memory has the oyster *not* been referred to as “the succulent bi-valve.”)

Consternation reigned at the 1934 Oyster Feast when the Bishop of Chelmsford announced that he had eaten no oysters. Here is a newspaper account of the matter:

“HERESY” AT AN OYSTER FEAST

BISHOP’S CONFESSION:

‘I HAVE EATEN NONE OF THE 10,000’

“We had just reached that stage of philosophic calm which was ultimately attained by the Walrus and the

Carpenter; a calm tinged with a not unpleasurable melancholy at the sight of ten thousand empty shells being carried away.

"We had, in fact, partaken of the Colchester Oyster Feast, and we sat back contentedly attentive as the Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr. H. A. Wilson, rose to speak. Then came the shock.

"I have to announce that I have eaten no oysters.' The Bishop's voice rang out in clear tones.

"Heresy,' gasped my neighbour. The man opposite turned pale, and recalling the waiter, ordered another dozen.

"The Bishop proceeded.

"I understand that rather more than ten thousand oysters have been eaten to-day. I can say with a clear conscience that I have had nothing to do with the slaughter of the innocents.

"This confession will, I am aware, make me popular with none but the oysters themselves. I think I can hear the soft applause of ten thousand empty shells, thanking me for my kindness to their species.

"Now I have confessed, and you have the unpleasant truth.'

"And with a true appreciation of a brave man, the hundreds of oyster enthusiasts gave Dr. Wilson round after round of applause."

Mr. Hector Bolitho has said that the Mayor of Colchester is a man whom he envies more than any other man in England. "You may," he says,

"be Mayor of Cheddar and eat its cheese; you may be Mayor of Selkirk and eat buns, or Mayor of Edinburgh and eat rock. But the only place which would tempt me to wear a mayoral chain would be Colchester, especially on the day of the oyster feast. To every oyster-lover, whose season of happiness is about to begin, there is one compensation of the grim possibility of being hanged. One is allowed, I believe, to make one's last feast upon whatever food one wishes. I cannot think of any more delightful prelude to the rope than a feast of one thousand oysters, after which, perhaps, death itself would be sweet. And there would be one final warning to the oyster lover . . . he must perform his murders so that he will be hanged in a month with an R."

"Let us royster with the oyster—in the shorter
days and moister,
That are brought by brown September, with its
roguish final R;
For breakfast, or for supper, on the under shell
or upper,
Of dishes he's the daisy and of shellfish he's
the star."



But, of course, the City of London is more renowned for its hospitality than any other body in the world. A friend of mine met, somewhere in the Middle West of the United States, a man who had been a delegate to the Conference of the International Union

of Local Authorities, held in London in 1932. One of the first things of which the American spoke was the reception which the delegates had attended at the Guildhall. The Government reception (where weak claret cup could be obtained with difficulty) was justly consigned to oblivion; the City reception (where, if I may coin a phrase, champagne flowed like water) had become a legend.

The following menu from a City dinner in the later 'eighties illustrates the abundance of good fare provided in those days:

Mulligatawny	Vermicelli
Stewed Eels en Matelotte	
Salmon, Lobster Sauce	
Whitebait, plain and devilled	
Oyster Patties	
Sweetbreads and Mushrooms	
Roast Turkey and Sausages	
Boiled Fowls	York Ham
Saddles of Mutton	Dressed Salads
Roast Pheasants	Fried Potatoes
Sir Watkin Pudding	
Orange and Noyeau Jellies	
Stewed Prunes	Pineapple Creams
Maids of Honour	Ice Pudding
Dessert	

On this occasion it is interesting to learn that the musical programme which followed it was provided by the members themselves. How they could sing after such a meal it is difficult to imagine!

CHAPTER III

THE COUNCIL AND ITS COMMITTEES

"To-day, if we see an English country gentleman in his car, he is going to a Committee Meeting. If by some fantastically exceptional chance we find him enjoying himself, then we know that he has cut a Committee Meeting."
(From a letter in *The Countryman*.)

"No one," writes Sir Alfred Zimmern, "likes to sit for hours listening to other men talking; nor does the situation become very much more tolerable when hundreds of others are listening too. Hence the atmosphere of boredom and languor so conspicuous (as seen from the galleries) in most modern Parliaments as in all large Committees, a vision of men striving desperately after the unattainable—to waste none of their own time and yet to follow conscientiously the main thread of the discussion. And hence the ever-increasing tendency to concentrate the real power and the real work in more business-like quarters—in the hands of cabinets and committees and 'civil servants.'"¹

¹ We are still without a book on "the psychology of committee work"; but the right number to discuss a complex matter of business is about seven, "because that number of men can sit round a small table, talk with each other informally, without waste of words or any display of pretence, provide an adequate diversity of points of view and modes of dealing with the subject in hand, and be prompt and efficient in the discharge of business."

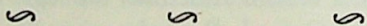
During the sixteenth century Town Council Meetings were developing the many formalities that constitute procedure to-day. In 1500 the Mayor of Coventry was instructed "to keep Council once in a week specially on the Wednesday, and the Mayor's Sergeant shall warn the Mayor's Brethren every Tuesday to be at St. Mary's Hall at the Council on the Wednesday." In most towns formal notice of the Council meetings were given and fines enforced for late or non-attendance. At Chester in 1571 the members were attending so irregularly "that the Mayor many times for want of sufficient number had been forced to break up the meeting without notice of any order being taken." To remedy this it was decided that the Serjeant "shall give notice before seven o'clock the evening before—to the party, his wife, or to a child over nine years of age," and at the beginning of the meeting the names were to be called and absentees fined. At Ipswich the by-laws required that "the Horn and Trumpe must be blown in each ward the night preceding the meeting," and one important meeting had to be abandoned because "there was not time to give a certain Alderman the legal notice."

From the Oxford Records may be seen how Councillors were expected to behave at the meeting. "Every man of the Council—excepting Mayors past and present, Aldermen and Justices—speaking in the Council House, shall stand up bare-headed and uncovered, in decent order telling his tale; and whosoever beginneth any talk not then and there standing up

bare-headed and uncovered—except those before excepted—shall pay for every so doing, fourpence to be paid forthwith. Anyone interrupting he that telleth



his tale to forfeit fourpence, except the Mayor, who may speak to him as he listeth.”¹



So much for the past!

Now before I revert to the present, perhaps those readers who are unacquainted with local government procedure could better appreciate the stories which I have assembled for inclusion in this chapter if I gave

¹ *Town Government in the Sixteenth Century.*

a brief description—and I promise that it shall be brief—of how a modern Council arranges its work. It has so many different duties and functions assigned to it that it is obviously impossible for it to deal itself with the whole of its extensive and varied work. It accordingly splits itself up into groups of workable size, called Committees, which deal with the various matters under its control.

The Watch Committee deals with police administration, the Water Committee with the supply of water, the Highways Committee with the maintenance of roads, and so on.

A Municipal Committee is the nearest approach that can be reached in public life to a Board of Directors.

Periodically—usually once a month—the Committees make reports on their work to the Council and submit recommendations to the Council as to its future course of action.



Many people (both Councillors and officials) have complained about the time wasted in some Committees, and the need for a general “speeding up” of Committee work.

Here, for example, is an account given by Lady Simon of her experiences—some years ago—on the Cleansing Committee of the Manchester City Council.

“Now I want to tell you a story. When I first became a member of the City Council in 1925, I was put on

the Cleansing Committee, a Committee in charge of street cleaning and refuse collection. I was the only woman on it and the men were experts in buying horses. At that time Manchester did all of its refuse collecting by means of horse-drawn carts. The Committee bought the hay and oats for the horses. At one Council Meeting we found samples of hay to be smelled and examined. Then little dishes of oats were passed around. When these things came to me I said, 'You know, Mr. Chairman, I don't think my opinion would be worth very much.' He tried to show me how to test oats. After that I pretended to test the oats and pass upon them. We also had a Sub-committee that looked after the horses and gave instructions as to when they should be killed. One day the Chairman made a long speech saying he was very sorry to have to inform the Committee that since the last meeting he had to order that a horse be killed. Then a large parcel, wrapped in dirty newspapers, was brought to the table. I opened it and inside was something that looked like a football. I found that it was a stone that had been taken out of the horse, and it was being shown to the Committee to prove that the horse ought to have been destroyed. I can tell this story because the Committee no longer concerns itself with such details."



Now, without more ado, let me recount the stories about Councils and Committees which many correspondents have sent to me.

You will be able to gather from the stories with what a diversity of subjects the various Committees of Local Authorities have to deal.

“At a meeting of the Council there was a discussion with regard to the type of milk which should be



“... TAKE THE BULL BY THE HORNS ...”

provided for schoolchildren, and the Chairman of the Health Committee, in the course of his remarks, made the following statement:

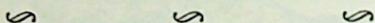
“What this town needs is a supply of clean fresh milk, and the Council should take the bull by the horns and demand it.”

“The Town Council had been receiving complaints of noise from children playing in the roadway adjoining the Cemetery at the time of burial services. The matter was referred to the Cemetery Committee for inquiry.

"At the next meeting of the Council (this was before the days of printed reports) the Mayor called on the Vice-Chairman of the Cemetery Committee (who was also Vice-Chairman of the Allotments Committee) for his report. By some means the latter had transposed the reports and much merriment ensued when he hastily trotted out:

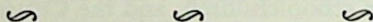
"'Allotments—'all quiet.'

"'Cemetery—'everything growing well.'"



"COUNCILLOR (*a Doctor*) denouncing in a very heated manner a scheme put forward by the Opposition Party: 'This proposal is abominable, it should be strangled at birth.'

"COUNCILLOR (*an Undertaker*) on the other side: 'Well, *you* should know how to do it.'"



"The subject of debate in the Council was the personnel of the Watch Committee, and several members had objected to a proposal that such should include a member who was a licensed victualler. At the close of the debate a pompous and ill-educated Alderman rose to support the objection, and round off the discussion.

"He stated that the matter might be summed up in one sentence: 'The membership of the Watch Committee must be above suspicion like Potiphar's wife.'

"After the laughter had subsided, and a whisper in

his ear from another member, the Alderman added, 'I seem to have mentioned the wrong lady.' "



"Attention was drawn at a Committee Meeting in Scotland to the fact that the percentage of lunacy in Aberdeenshire was higher than anywhere else.



" . . . ABOVE SUSPICION . . . "

"Whereupon one of the Councillors remarked, 'Ah, weel, ye see, folk that would be thought daft in Aberdeen would be thought gey wise anywhere else.' "



"A Council was considering an involved question relating to electricity, and politics and expert opinion clashed. A member of the Council stated quite plainly:

'How can we be expected to understand the first thing about these matters, so let us do what our Party has told us to do.' "



EXAMPLES OF "MALAPROPISMS"

"Owing to the death of our lamentable Provost . . ."

"We should all express our gratitude to the County Surveyor for his notorious services."

"Mr. Chairman, there's an undercurrent of atmosphere in this Committee . . ."

" . . . and I hope, Gentlemen, that you will support the Chairman of the Town Planning Committee in his efforts to preserve for posterity these beautiful, atheistic surroundings."

The Council were discussing the granting of an honorarium to a workman who had been in their employment for a great number of years. One Councillor interrupted the debate by saying: "What's the use of giving 'im an 'onorarium—'e couldn't play it if 'e 'ad it!"



"COUNCILLOR (*excitedly calling attention to certain old property in the town*): 'Everyone knows that dampness descends in an upward direction.' "



The Chairman of a certain Committee very heatedly protested against a certain step being taken, and he

concluded by saying that if the Committee insisted upon the step proposed, he would be left with no other alternative than to "vaccinate" his seat.

S S S

Another "malapropism" occurred during a discussion in committee on some proposed alterations to a public swimming bath:

"Would it not be possible, Mr. Chairman," asked a member, "to have the walls of the bath lined with aspidistras?" (He meant, of course, "asbestos.")

Still another Councillor indignantly stated in open Council:

"Mr. Mayor, in my opinion public affairs in this Borough are getting into a state of *choss*!"¹

S S S

A Councillor, in his desire to pay tribute to one who was distinguished by long and meritorious services, stated, "The labours of Mr. Blank in municipal work are 'hindifitijible.'"

The same gentleman once, speaking of the deposit of ashes on a refuse tip, came out with the classic phrase, "This district will soon be the 'rendezvuzz' of rats and other varmin!"

Another member of the Council frequently created amusement by the improper use of the aspirate. On one occasion, in response to a complaint as to an alleged delay in the arrival of the fire brigade, he stated:

¹ Chaos.

"Hif the fire his hin the country the hengine his got haway has soon has possible. There his no delay hat hall. Hon hevery hoccasion the hengine his hout quick."

(The converse of this would appear to be the "ymn of 'ate" reputed to have been sung by a disgruntled night watchman against a member of a Council who was well known for his piety:

"'Umning 'is old 'ymn toons, the oily old 'ypocrite. Oh, 'ow I 'ates 'im.")

A Chairman of an Education Committee was opening a new Elementary School. In the course of his speech, he said, "We have tried to make this school one of the most up-to-date in the country. The corridors are lined with virtuous¹ tiles and heated by a cauliflower."²

*Ere e comes the oily umbing umning is oily imo
oh ow I atern*

THE MAYOR (*passing round Requisition Book of Electricity Department*): "Any remarks on the Requisitions?"

AN ALDERMAN: "Yus, Mr. Mayor. One of our Clurks 'ere spells 'undredweight with a K."

(The entry is 50 KWT (Kilowatt).)

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"Some little time ago a Borough Council were discussing a certain matter when one of the Aldermen

¹ Vitreous.

² Calorifier.

rose and proceeded to express very vehemently his opinion upon this particular subject. His peroration ended something like this: 'I am dead against this; dead! dead!! dead!!!' at the end of which he suddenly sat down. From his seat opposite, another member of the Council solemnly rose, proceeded across the Council Chamber, and presented the former member with his business card, which was that of an Undertaker. Needless to say the Council was convulsed, and the prompt action of the Undertaker saved a somewhat awkward situation."

S S S

A Chairman of a Housing Committee, presenting a scheme for building houses, said:

"It is the intention of the Housing Committee to erect a number of houses for single couples about to be married!"

The same Chairman, when referring to slum clearance, emulated the late Canon Spooner by pronouncing it "Clum Slearance."

S S S

COUNCILLOR (*at Council Meeting*): "Mr. Mayor, I see the Committee have bought a norse."

TOWN CLERK: "A what, Mr. Councillor?"

COUNCILLOR: "A norse. Don't you know what a norse is?"

TOWN CLERK: "Oh, say a pony!"

S S S

A Councillor at a Council Meeting, where the question of houses sub-let in lodgings was being discussed, referred to "these unsculpturous landlords flinching the money out of the pockets of the rate-payers."



Another Councillor, referring to a rather fractious member of one of the Committees, called him "the bugbearer on the Committee, always using vulgar fractions."



For several months the Education Committee had had under consideration the admittedly bad conditions of a school feeding centre and consequential indifferent health of the staff. At the present meeting the Committee received a notice from the cook tendering her resignation. The kindly and considerate Chairman was shocked at the receipt of the notice, and in his deep and feeling voice addressed the members: "Lady and Gentlemen [there was one lady member present], this is a terrible thing; we should be ashamed of ourselves; we are responsible for this woman's condition . . ." At this point he was interrupted by a member, one of the well-informed, and told that the reason for the notice was that the lady was expecting to become a mother.



A recommendation to the effect that the Cemetery Committee be authorized to spend £16 in connection with the consecration of a further portion of the cemetery was opposed by a Councillor, who stated that he could not understand why the cemetery should be consecrated, and anyway, if the Council decided to do the work, he knew it would cost a lot more than £16, because he had just had his backyard done.

S S S

At a meeting of a Housing Committee complaints were made by one Councillor that non-union men were employed by a contractor for a Council Housing Scheme, and that they were being paid on the basis of piece work.

COUNCILLOR: "Well, Mr. Chairman, I have been there myself, and I could *see* there was something wrong."

CHAIRMAN: "How do you mean, 'something wrong'? Do you mean they were in a hurry?"

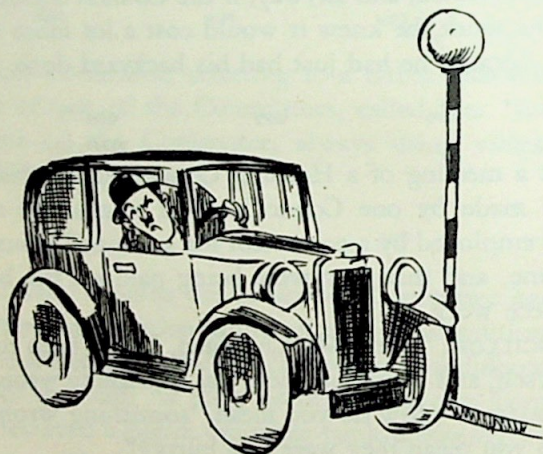
S S S

The Highways Committee were discussing the installation of Belisha Beacons. One Councillor caused considerable amusement by remarking:

"Mr. Chairman, if I were driving along in an ordinary sort of car—say an Austin Seven—I don't think I could see these Beacons at all—they'd be much too high!"

S S S

The Chairman of the Health Committee, who was noted for his sincerity rather than his ability, was reading from the Medical Officer's Annual Report. He stated that the death-rate for the previous year was 10·9 per 1,000. One of the opposition, desiring



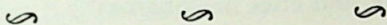
“ . . . MUCH TOO HIGH . . . ”

to make capital out of his lack of scholarship, said: “What does the 10·9 mean, Mr. Chairman?” “Why,” said the Chairman, “what else can it mean but that ten out of every thousand have died during the year and a further nine have been at the point of death.”

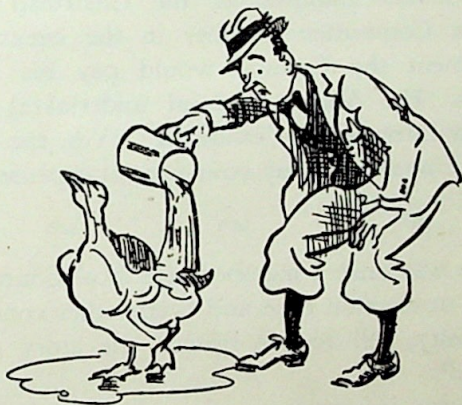
[Which reminds me of the story of the boy who asked his father what an average was.

“Well, my boy,” he replied, “it’s like this. If you and I were standing under a tree and one of us were

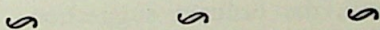
killed by lightning, on an average we'd both be half dead!"]



It happened at a Board Meeting of one of the Liverpool Boards of Guardians some years ago. One



of the members was addressing the meeting and, warming up to his subject, he said: "It is like pouring water on a duck's back—it's fertile."¹

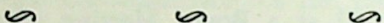


The Surveyor and Chairman of the Highways had been instructed to report upon a case of a claim by a young lady for damage to her clothing from tar spraying.

¹ Futile.

CHAIRMAN: "Well, gentlemen, the Surveyor and me has inspected these here petticuts."

(Laughter, and cries of "Shame!")



An applicant for a position under a provincial Town Council inquired of the Chairman of the Selection Committee whether in the event of his appointment the Council would pay his removal expenses. The Mayor (a local undertaker) absent-mindedly informed the candidate: "Yes, the Council would be pleased to pay your funeral expenses."



There was once a member of a local Council who did not, at election time and every other conceivable opportunity, tell to his friends the story of "the gondola."

(For the information of readers who are not members or officers of local authorities, here is the Gondola story):

The Parks Committee were discussing the purchase of a gondola for their ornamental lake, when one member made the brilliant suggestion: "Why not buy two, Mr. Chairman, while you're at it, and let 'em breed!"



The Medical Officer had just reported upon sterilization of milk supplies and grading generally.

A MEMBER: "I for one don't 'old with all this clutter about sterelizin'—I'm the worst side of sixty and I've allus drunk biled milk—you bile it well and there can't be no bugs left—'ow can they live, 'otted up like that?"

S S S

A CAPTIOUS CRITIC

(*Scene: A meeting of the Maternity and Child Welfare Committee*)

CHAIRMAN: "The Requisition Book contains a list amounting to £2 10s. The only item besides the usual cleaning materials for the caretaker is an electric steriliser. Shall I sign the list as approved?"

A COUNCILLOR (*with triumphant "Now I've got you!" expression*): "Madam Chairman, the Council have never authorised sterilisation at the Institute."

At this stage, the Medical Officer of Health disgraced himself by laughing aloud. But the Chairman explained that it was only proposed to replace the worn-out Steriliser used for the doctors' and dentists' instruments—and the book was duly signed.

S S S

MAKING HIMSELF CLEAR!

Speaking to a motion that a special committee should be set up to investigate the present organisation of his council's work, a Councillor remarked:

"I don't want you to think, my Lord Mayor, that I'm beating the air—I am merely attacking an atmosphere!"

CHAPTER IV

OFFICIALS

It has been said that officials may be divided into two classes—those who work and those who show others how to work. The latter are often called “administrators.”¹

Whether or not there is any validity in such a division, the local government service embraces a great variety of officers and workmen, including solicitors, doctors, engineers, accountants, librarians, school teachers, dentists, chemists, sanitary inspectors, health visitors, policemen, superintendents of baths, housing estates and parks, blacksmiths, dustmen and road sweepers. A rum lot, as the devil remarked when he was shown the Ten Commandments.

Someone once wrote: “I think the general opinion is that a public official is a man who is employed by everyone, paid by everyone, kept by everyone, and criticized by everyone, and in the majority of cases praised by nobody and thanked by nobody. It is a wonder to me that, when he wakes up each morning, he knows who he is, what he is, or where he is.”

It is very difficult, as the Western Brothers would say, for us prefects to tell you fags all about the work-

¹ “Cynics have said that the best administrator is the man who never does anything for himself which he can find anyone else to do for him, and who always agrees with a difference.” (From *Birkenhead, the Last Phase*.)

ing of the local government machine. One might indulge in a long disquisition about nuisances and non-provided schools, privies and pleasure-grounds, scavenging and slaughter-houses, highways and hairdressers' shops—cabbages and kings; one might



“A KIND OF SHANTY”

make a few quips about Belisha Beacons (alternatively christened ‘Belicons’ or ‘Orbelishas’), describe with infinite gusto the correct proportion of non-fatty solids permissible in milk, or grow eloquent over the algebraic formula devised by Mr. Neville Chamberlain for the determination of the amount of “Block Grant” to be made from the Imperial Exchequer to local authorities. This formula is, indeed, regarded by some local government officers as a kind of shanty, and they

can frequently be heard singing it to themselves in a minor key while they are waiting for bus or tram.

Low gave his version of the famous de-rating formula by a cartoon of Mr. Neville Chamberlain, in gown and mortar-board, chalking on the blackboard:

"Subtract from the Rates the Condition of Industry, the Petrol Tax, multiply by the number of children, take away the number you first thought of, and make someone pay the difference."

WHAT PRICE RELIEF?

ANSWER: BE GOOD BOYS AND PUT YOUR
TRUST IN TEACHER



I will leave my letters from ratepayers and anecdotes about officials to speak for themselves and merely say, by way of explanation to the uninitiated, that the officials of local authorities are responsible for the actual administration of the various services under the authorities' control. The Council decides upon policy; the officials carry their decisions into effect. As one of His Majesty's Ministers is to his particular Government Department, so is a local Council to its officers. That is the theory, at any rate. In practice it is often extremely difficult to discover the exact point where policy ends and administration begins.

In this chapter I want first to illustrate the wide scope of the services which are offered to the public

to-day by contrasting them with the scanty services provided in the past; then to show, by quoting actual letters addressed to various officials, the multifarious character of their present-day duties; and, finally, to relate some true stories about local government officials which should not only show the wide range of their work but will, I hope, afford some amusement.

S S S

We are apt at times to think of local government as a comparatively recent development. So it is in its modern form. But there was, in fact, local government in Britain long before there was central government.

Again, the ancient Romans had a form of organized cleansing service. The streets and sewers of Rome were regularly cleansed by slaves and convicts under the control of a supervising magistrate. Enactments were in force against the deposit of refuse in unsuitable places. There is an ancient pillar in Rome which bears a Latin inscription to the following effect: "Take your rubbish farther on or you will be fined." (Compare our modern slogan, "Burn your rubbish and save your rates!").

"A bronze tablet found in Aljustrel in Southern Portugal shows the care taken by the Roman Government to regulate the details of life in the mining village which was, of course, its property. The local shopkeepers worked, it seems, under contract with the State. The keeper of the public baths has to supply

hot water every day, clean his boilers once a month, admit women from daybreak till one p.m. and men from two till eight, and exclude soldiers, children, and the freedmen and slaves employed by the Imperial procurator. The shoemaker must provide footwear of all kinds and sell hobnails 'according to the regulations of the ironworks.' The licensed barber has a monopoly except that private slaves may shave their masters or fellows. Schoolmasters pay no rates."¹

On reading the following account, in *Town Government in the Sixteenth Century*, of the work and duties of the town authorities and their officers about four hundred years ago, it is difficult to refrain from quoting—"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Nevertheless, a comparison of that earlier century with our own does bring up in sharp relief the organized method of our modern local administration.

At Ipswich and Coventry the citizens had every Saturday to clean and sweep the streets before their houses, and were fined for any failure to do so, the Common Sergeant going round the streets at Coventry each Sunday to see that it had been done.

Early in the sixteenth century some town authorities realized that the best method was to arrange for carters to collect the rubbish. The Coventry authorities decided that "there be a cart to carry weekly the filth away." ". . . each Hall door to pay quarterly one penny, every shop and cottage one half-penny."

At Lincoln a carter was appointed to remove the

¹ *The Legacy of Rome.*

rubbish each week, "every man giving him for his labour as they might agree." This was in 1538; at the beginning of the following century a town official was instructed "to employ sufficient men and carts to carry away the dust and sweeping of houses and streets twice a week."



At this period the pig wandering at large was considered the greatest nuisance, being a danger to health and rendering futile all attempts to keep the streets clean.

Ipswich made many by-laws on the subject, but finding that in spite of all regulations some owners allowed their pigs to roam, it was ordered that all pigs should be marked so that owners of wandering animals could be traced and fined. All pigs found in the streets unmarked were sold at once by the authorities, and the money added to the town funds. At Oxford, any

owner of a pig found at large in the street was to be fined, and the "bailiff" also heavily fined if he neglected to enforce the by-law.

The lighting of the streets is so essentially a part of street development that no excuse is needed for its appearance here. When the idea originated, safety was the chief consideration. At first the individual

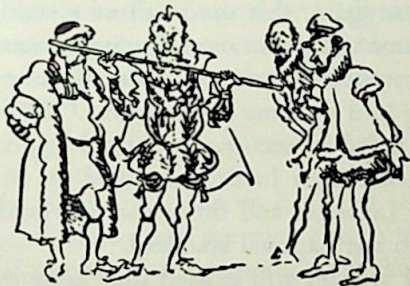


"THE LIGHT BETOKENED AN HONEST MAN"

had to carry the light, and an old by-law of Northampton, issued in the fourteenth century, makes the reason clear. After stating that a bell would be rung at nine o'clock each night "for the space of one hour lasting" so that those "in the fields may more quickly reach the town," it goes on to order that no one shall be in the street after the ringing of the bell "unless he carry a light and have reasonable excuse." The light betokened an honest man from whom nothing need be feared. Northampton did not adopt street lighting until the middle of the seventeenth century, but then

it was for a different reason. "Every householder taxed to the poor was to display a lantern with a candle alighted in it—for the lighting of passengers to and fro in the streets."

Another important duty of local authorities, both now and in the past, is to safeguard the public against the sale of impure articles or of articles of short weight. In the past there was, of course, considerable



"BROKEN AND PEASONED AGAIN WITH TIN"

lack of uniformity about measures in various parts of the country.

During more than a quarter of a century the national authorities tried to compel Leicester to adopt a particular standard measure. The whole attempt illustrates how difficult it was for them to force regulations on the towns. The Clerk of the Queen's Household visited Leicester in 1579, and announced that there was great dissatisfaction over one of the measures used in the market. "The insatiable greed of our standard strike," as the scribe records. He was invited to test the measures, and the yard measure was

found too long. "It had been broken and peasoned again with tin, whereby it is now too long," and the "Strike" made for use in the market was "too big by a pottle, but is now made fit." The Chamberlain's accounts show that in fines and replacements the visit cost the town nearly £20, and that for "the Strike that was too big by a pottle as he supposed," they had been fined £2 7s. A few years later the official came again, this time "all of a sudden," and with the same complaint over the Strike measure, but the town escaped a penalty, for the Mayor succeeded in "willing him to come another time." Many successive visits failed to secure the desired reform, and in 1600 the Lord High Justice reminded the Mayor that eventually Leicester and other places would have to conform to the national standard.

In small villages still existed the "common oven," the property of the Lord of the Manor. The one at Manchester was leased to a baker for 6s. 8d. yearly, and the Leet Jury there "requested all loving neighbours to come and bake with the said baker, he baking their bread and other necessities as he ought to do." But the disadvantage of the common oven was revealed when the baker at Southampton "changed his times" and the people had their dough spoiled. As a remedy he was ordered to have his oven ready at the same hour each day, and to send his boy round to notify the people.¹

S S S

¹ *Town Government in the Sixteenth Century.*

The following extract from Sanderson's *Polito Publick Courier* 1728 is interesting evidence of the early struggle of local government officers for an improvement in their "emoluments."

"Last week several persons of the Guild of Local Officers being gathered at the sign of the 'Blue Anaconda' for the purpose of petitioning Parliament praying their emoluments to be raised by one shilling a month, they were set upon by a riotous mob of taxpayers and dragged to the river, from which many of them were removed by the Watch in a stinking condition."



Here is a quaint advertisement of a Holborn destroyer of obnoxious vermin, date 1781—before the days of Sanitary Inspectors and Disinfectors:

BUGGS

Be they ever so numerous are
effectually destroyed by

Eleanor Brainiff

Daughter and Successor to her late Father,
George Bridges (Bugg-Destroyer to His Majesty's
Household) and Widow of the late Peter Brainiff
(now Hanna).

This is to acquaint the Nobility, Gentry and others, to whom I have the honour of being known for my skill in totally eradicating these obnoxious Vermin from the Places where I have been employed, that I

may always be heard of at that wellknown public house, the St. Andrew, opposite St. Andrew's Church, Holborn, and at Mr. Westrages, Peruke-Maker, at Exeter-Change in the Strand, being obliged thereto through a set of infamous Pretenders to the above



Science misdirecting my Employers, though they know I am the Original, for a proof of which please to inquire at Mr. Fountain's Boarding School, Marylebone; Mr. Rosselloty's school at Hoxton; at the French Charity School, Tottenham Court Road, and Many Thousands more too tedious to mention.

Letters and Orders, directed as above, shall be punctually obeyed and duly answered, at the following prices; stump beds without Furniture 5s., Bureau

and Settees, ditto, 10s. 6d. each, plain Four post ditto, 10s. 6d. each, Cornice ditto 15s., raised Testers, with double Laths £1 1s.

Such beds as I cure I will engage to keep clean for 1s. 6d. per year per bed.

N.B.—The Beds will be fit for immediate Use as my Composition is free from any Smell and neither stains or hurts in any Degree the finest Furniture.



Let us come now (we are bound to face the ordeal sometime) to the local government officer of to-day. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, there are so many people of different trades and professions included in the local government service that it is folly to talk of local officials "conforming to type."

Nevertheless, I want to quote two admirably written passages from M. Georges Courtelines' book *The Bureaucrats*. The first depicts a survivor from the era of Bumbledom:

"Free to swim and splash and gambol in a sea of official paper, of legal disputes and administrative reports accumulated since the earliest years of the Department, he spent delightful days running from his room to the Registry, where he would pass long, mysterious hours, and whence he would return, white with dust, clasping to his shirt-front, with his great gnarled fists, files hung with festoons of spiders' webs, which he had obviously routed from the remotest attics. He brought an expanding ladder to the office,

from the top of which, with smiling but savage determination, he would ransack the recesses of his room, sounding the ceiling and the walls with blows of his fist, desperately set on discovering papers and still more papers. Ancient files, torn violently from their shelves, would burst open upon his already venerable head, letting fall avalanches of papers which



floated through the room like hovering albatrosses, and came to rest in scattered fragments on the floor. Perfectly at home in the heart of all this devastation, perched upon the top of his ladder in silent, smiling joy, Van der Hogen was happy. And when at last all around him chaos reigned supreme, Van der Hogen would take up his pen and write Minutes.

"Between two ramparts of files balanced at each extremity of his table—ramparts which shook disquietingly with the reverberation of the passing traffic—he would cover with his large handwriting

innumerable sheets of paper. These, in veritable trolley loads, he would send for the Director's approval and initials; these, the following morning, found their way to the lavatories. They were amazing disquisitions—the Minutes of Van der Hogen—in which the claims of obscure collaterals, in their graves long years before, were favourably considered, and in which lawyers sent to the galleys for forgery in 1818 were reported to the legal authorities as guilty of the infraction of regulations long since cancelled.”

And here is the other cameo. The touching address explaining why no promotions could be made after a death had occurred in the department should appeal strongly to every local government officer. (At the age of fifty, as Dean Inge has said somewhere, fatty degeneration of the conscience is apt to set in!)

“He knew it so well that a few days before he had had a long discussion on the subject with the Director, who had simply entrenched himself behind the impossibility of taking any action. Indeed the Director, Monsieur Negre, was one of those amiable, easy-going gentlemen who inspire neither fear nor confidence. Still comparatively young, tall, and handsome, with hair slightly and prematurely powdered with grey, he brought to his task the prestige of his extreme personal elegance, and the smiling scepticism of an augur of the Decadence. His eloquence, which was as soft as a caress, made him very valuable—indeed indispensable, in that establishment on the Rue Vaneau in which the gentle art of promising

more butter than bread took the place of increments in salary; and, in point of fact, he was unrivalled at administering the soothing syrup of speeches as unctuous with good will as they were devoid of good faith. His utter incapacity and his gift for the resounding phrase assured him a splendid destiny.

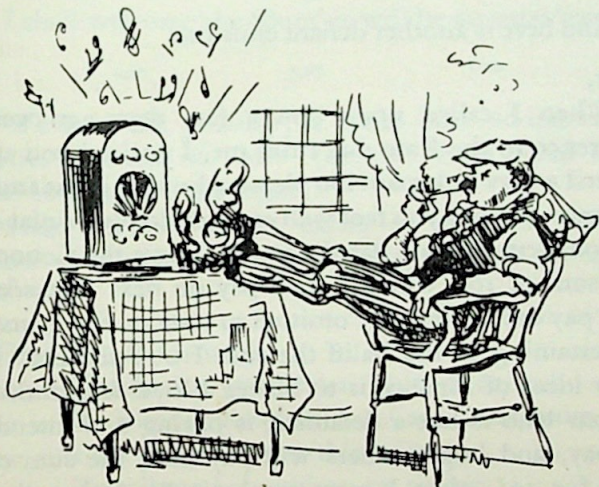
“‘The increments in question,’ proceeded Monsieur Negre, letting fall his paper with one hand and his monocle with the other, ‘cannot be granted to everyone. Several of you gentlemen have reached the maximum salary laid down by the Official Regulations for the posts which you hold, or have benefited by recent increments. They must be content to hope! Better days will dawn, perhaps very soon; for life—could we, indeed, have a more terribly evident proof of this?—is fertile in the unforeseen. Others, not in this position, rely on their well-founded claims. Alas! to more than one of these I am compelled to cry, Hope! I regard you, one and all, as my friends who wish me well; let me appeal to you to regard me as yours and trust me yet once more.’”



While it is impossible not to feel sympathy with the real or imaginary grievances which prompt the writers of the numerous letters of complaint addressed to officers of local authorities, it is equally impossible to see no humour in the weirdly assorted phraseology and the confused thought which almost invariably distinguish such effusions.

Here is a typical "grouse":

"I wonder how it is that some people get off their rates so easy while others have to try and pay theirs and it is a great struggle. There is a man up in —



Street who gets help from the relief fund and a bag of coals. Also he gets money from the guardians and can sport a wireless. He is supposed to be a poorly man, but he can sit up listening in very late at night, if you think that is right, I don't, he can stop in bed till the streets get warm, then sit smoking and listening in, we have to struggle on with our rates and be hounded to death if we don't pay them I think a man with six or seven children has enough loud speakers enough without having such luxuries as wireless no

one would say a word about food as children has to be fed but a wireless is something we have to do without if we went for any help we should get insulted even though we have little to do on.

A HONEST RATEPAYER."

And here is another defiant effusion :

"Sir,

When I called upon you a few days ago with reference to the Rate due from me, I noticed you appeared a very sick man. Do please take a long rest from Finance. Should you feel well enough do please glance at your letter to me dated 29.5.33. I owe the Council the sum of 10s. which I shall pay on next Thursday (my pay day). You have omitted to state on the memo. appertaining to the Baliff the sum I owe the B.C. If your ideas of Finance is to blister a loyal and dutiful citizen who is not a defaulter, is paying and intends to pay, and hopes others will pay him, the sum of 16s. for 10/-, then I most emphatically declare that if you are responsible for this inefficiency you should be removed from your post as the Borough Treasurer. I am a Government Servant, Ex. R.N.A.S., and as such I demand (as I am not a Bolshie) justice.

I have no opportunity of casting a copy of this note of censure that I am sending you as a servant of the B.C. but I let it go and 'Damn the consequences !'

Return my papers please.

P.S.—Where is your Magistrate's order committing me to the Baliff?

Unofficial.

Your most courteous Rate Clerk informed me that if I paid just before the end of the month it would be O.K. and there was no need for me or him to trouble you. The *intense* desire to get clear was sufficient.

I shall welcome the 'Bum' it will be an experience."



We have all, possibly, at times been addressed as "Mrs." instead of "Mr." (or vice versa), and have had to put the thing right.

Here are two recent examples from the official archives showing (i) how to do it; (ii) how *not* to do it:

"Dear Sir (or Madam),

Thanks for your letter, 'chit' or chitti,¹

Re Eleanor Road School Care Committee.

I am delighted you think fitting

To tell me I should go on sitting.

There is a slight mistake though. This is—

I am a 'Reverend' not a 'Mrs.'

Yours faithfully,

D. B. H.

¹ And please forgive the Hindustani, O Maharaj (or Maharani).

"Sir,

Refs. your minute I contents noted, presumably the Slur, in matter of address as 'Madam' denotes I

am an old woman in applying for permission to confer with the Heads of departments relative to my work. If I had you or any of your clerks in the Service or on the Somme you wouldn't have found much old woman in me and if ever I am called up again I will as an R.S.M. mark time on some of your people.

Yours truly,

C. H. W. D.

R.S.M."

And here are further examples of official correspondence:

(1) THE COMPLAINT:

"Dear Sir,

When I left my home — Street, I decided to leave it quite spotless and neat. I resolved I would cleanse all the walls and the doors, remove all the dirt from the rooms and the floors. When the woman engaged was making it neater, a man popped along to look at the meter. The woman exclaimed, 'Don't turn it off yet, to wash all the floors I've hot water to get.' 'All right, my dear lady,' the Reader did say, 'I'll leave enough gas to last thro' the day.' And now I'm astonished! Oh! what an offence to be told I am a debtor to you for Four-Pence. At this time of the year, what with Rates, Sir and Rent, and an Income Demand—Five and seventy per cent, it comes pretty stiff, when a further claim's made, for four-penn'orth of gas which I thought that I'd paid.

Now what I have stated, I'd swear by St. Denis, so please do not think I'm a Merchant of Venice. But wipe out the debt standing now to my name, a magnanimous gesture! 'twould add to your fame!

Yours faithfully,
_____”

(2) THE REPLY:

“Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge your letter received, and regret to observe that you feel so aggrieved at the charge which was made for the hundred odd feet of the gas that was used at your house ——— Street.

The charge for the gas is so small that you will not object, I am sure, to my paying the bill. I have done so, and now send you with compliments, a receipt in your name, for the sum of fourpence.

Yours faithfully,

City Treasurer.”



The Rating Officer to the Llantarnam (Monmouthshire) Urban District Council is not only a humorist, but evidently also something of a poet. This is how, not long ago, he encouraged the delinquents to pay up in time to secure discount:

“Dear Sir, or Madam,

‘A Bird in the hand is worth two in the Bush.’

The shrewd business man is always alert,
 Bet your last cent he goes nap on a cert.
 With regard to his payments, his motto is this—
 'Take advantage of discounts, 'tis really good "bizz".'

This without doubt is the true reason why
 He pays all his rates by the end of July,
 So come along early—avoid all the rush—
 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.'

No allowances can be made after July 31st.

Yours obediently,

E. A. P."

The cordial relations which reminders of this type create between the Rating Officer and his flock are evident from the nature of the responses. A poetical cleric replied to the Rating Officer thus :

"Dear Sir,

I am glad of your letter this morning
 Quite a nice one; so charming; but really a warning
 That all, whether Canon, belted Earl or a Viscount,
 Must pay their rates early or else lose their discount.
 (Don't laugh at that rhyme; it's poetical licence)
 As I'm writing this, you must take it in my sense,
 If I'm to read poems by Mr. E. Pryer,
 Why D—— it, I'm blowed if I don't go one higher.
 Just let me add this, E.A.P. that you lie
 If you say I won't pay by the end of July.

J. J."

Some ratepayers of this pleasant Urban District spur the Rating Officer on to greater heights by themselves suggesting rhymes for future notices. The following was, apparently, suggested as a Notice before Summons:

A THREAT

“Roll up with your Rates,
And pay on the nail
For a husband at home
Is worth two in the jail.
W. B.”

The gossip writer for a provincial newspaper, referring to the efforts of the Llantarnam Rating Officer, himself displays some promise. Here is his idea of a final notice:

“Send £ s. d.
Within the week,
Or you will be
Before the ‘beak.’
No doubt his nibs
Will sharply speak,
So send the dibs
Within the week.”

A lady ratepayer sent a letter complaining of her inability to pay her rates, in which she stated that she had a bad leg which “ran away” with two or three shillings every week.

A ratepayer had sent the following letter with a cheque for half the amount of his rates :

"Dear Sir,

Having done my duty to my country in respect of



twins, the balance will be forwarded after a period of financial recuperation. Yours proudly . . ."

The Treasurer of the Council commented :

"Of course I shall ask this gentleman to come and see me, if only to congratulate him. To pay even half the rates demanded at such a time and on such an occasion shows a proper spirit."

Here are a few "hymns of hate" penned by disgruntled ratepayers, electricity consumers, and tenants of municipal housing estates :

"I enclose herewith cheque *even* date, and might have known what to expect from those who so notoriously are so unbusinesslike. Would they like to borrow about £50,000 to play marbles with?"



"Whilst you are revelling in hounding the ratepayers who haven't paid their rates (it is part of your job I suppose) don't for one moment think that you are doing so without incurring the hate and curses of the poor victims who are being bled to death and eventually forced to resort to the gas oven to find a way out of their misery and worry.

Don't forget when you throw the receipted form across to the demented devils who have had to find the money to pay you, that to them you are the personification of tyranny from which the ordinary individual who has to go without all kinds of things in order to provide men with good wages with a cheap Council house to live in at the expense of the ratepayers, that the whole system appears hopeless and really, one longs for death to escape the endless and ever-increasing load of taxation that is being placed on the very type of people that can ill afford it.

Yours,

'Last Gasp'."

The following spirited protest of an electricity consumer, whose supply had been disconnected owing to his failure to pay his electricity account, affords

another example of the denunciatory type of letter, written "to let off steam":

"Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter informing me that although I have given you a Banker's reference, a



private reference, a witness to my signature, and a business reference, all in duplicate, you cannot dispense with a monetary deposit. To be perfectly thorough, you should insist on a fidelity guarantee, a deposit of collateral security and a doctor's examination certificate also.

I am returning the enclosed instrument, as I have only one use for it. I originally wrongly filled it in 'in

duplicate' and thereby spent an evening in candle light and a day running about trying to find the original witness to my signature in order that you should have two signatures witnessed. And after all that, you send it back to me, as if I want it.

The vast lengths of pettyfogging red tape, jack-in-office, borough-officialdom rules can go to, leave me dazed.

I am well aware that this letter will be perused and calmly filed in a large file labelled 'Disgruntled Subscribers' but it has slightly relieved the strong feelings I have toward your autocratic institution.

Yours faithfully."



In the following extracts from letters received by a Pensions Committee, the elements of humour and pathos are intermingled:

"I cannot get sick pay; I have six children, can you tell me why this is. This is my eighth child. What are you going to do about it."

"Mrs. S. has no clothes—has not had any for over a year. The Clergy have been visiting her."

"In reply to your letter, I have already cohabited with your officers and so far without result."

"I am glad to say that my husband who was reported missing, is now dead."

"Sir, I am forwarding my marriage certificate and two children, one of which is a mistake as you will see."

"Unless I get my husband's money, I shall be forced to lead an immortal life."

"I am writing these few lines for Mrs. J. who cannot write herself. She expects to be confined next week and can do with it."

"I am sending my marriage certificate and six



"CHANGED MY LITTLE BOY INTO A GIRL"

children. I had seven and one died, which was baptised on half a sheet of notepaper by the Rev. Thomas."

"Please find out if my husband is dead, as the man I am living with won't eat or do anything until he knows for certain."

"In answer to your letter I have given birth to a boy weighing ten pounds. Is this satisfactory?"

"You have changed my little boy into a girl. Will this make any difference?"

"Please send my money at once, as I have fallen into errors with my landlord."

"I have no children. My husband is a bus driver and works day and night."

"In accordance with your instructions I have given birth to twins in the enclosed envelope."

"I want my money as quick as you can send it. I have been in bed with the Doctor for a week and he doesn't seem to be doing me much good. If things don't improve I shall have to get a new doctor."

"Dear Sir,

My husband has been away at the Crystal Palace and got a for days furlong and has now gone to the Mind Sweepers.

Yours respectfully."

"Dear Sir,

We have received your letter. I am his Grandfather and Grandmother, he was born and brought up in this house in answer to your letter.

Yours etc."

"Dear Sir,

In accordance with your instructions on ring paper, I have given birth to a daughter on 21st April.

Yours etc."

"Dear Sir,

My Bill has been pit in charge of a Spittoon (Platoon) shall I get any more pay?

Yours etc."

"Sir,

Will you please send my money as early as possible

as I am walking about in Bolton like a bloody pauper and oblige.

Yours . . ."

And here are some extracts from some letters addressed to the Small-holdings Department of a County Council:

"Enclosed please find the old hen has just laid again, she has been broody a long time but it always comes to those that waits."

"I am sending land rent. Would you please send a receipt as I have lost the remittance."

"Will you me word the amount Due to you from me for the rent due, from me for my my Holdings. . . ."



Then follows a miscellaneous assortment of letters on all kinds of subjects:

"Dear Sir,

Account for Renewal of Ashbin

Your letter of the 9th inst. is neither clear nor convincing to me as to why I should pay the sum of 6s. to the Blankton Corporation in connection with an article which had been purchased by me and which was my sole property. Still, I have about reached an age when I hesitate to call your bluff for so small a sum, post office order for which is enclosed.

There are two points I would like to make. The first is that all Blankton Corporation officials should be condemned for the rest of their lives to have ash-

bins chained to their necks, with the biggest round your own. The second is that the whole business has merely increased my amazement that the earthquake of 1906 should have selected San Francisco in preference to Blankton.

Yours truly,
(Sgd)."



"ASHBINS CHAINED TO THEIR NECKS . . ."

"Mr. ———

I am surprised you have taken so much trouble and time to chase me up for 2/9d. Well I hope you will see 2/9d. dance before your eyes sleeping and waking the same as I have. My brother got us to leave Sandbourne and come to Overcombe with him to live. He was a *devil* to us and ever since the 6th October there has been nothing but *trouble, sickness* and expence. You would have had it sooner or later 2/9d. The poor of Sandbourne my God did you ever know how poor

I was sometimes, how many *teas* dinners the Cheerful Sparrows our Hospital and the Sisters have I given to. Did you ever try to find out my good points or is it only 2/9d that is wanted for the poor. Ask any police officer to come and learn how many hours a day I am working and the pay, it makes one sick, I helped and worked in the Great War, the fellows in Germany was not forgotten, now at the age of 58 I am again trying to get a living, wonder how many of the so-called Sandbourne *poor* are doing the same. There is no one to make my brother pay *us* neither the dirty dog whom I had married, and am tied to for life. All this for 2/9d."

"Dear Sir,

In reply to your inquiry, I was married last week. I am sorry I made this error.

Yours truly."

"Dear Sir,

I thank you for the inconvenience I have caused you.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. . . ."

"Sir,

I beg to draw your attention to Mrs. — of —. This person lets out the whole of — in flats, to which there is no objection. She also has a concrete structure in her garden which she herself uses for habitation. In fact she lives and sleeps in this additional building.

What I do most bitterly complain about, however, is the fact that this woman, more with pride than shame, walks down her garden every morning with a commode in her hand. This, you doubtless will agree, is indecent and most objectionable.

A further point is: Has this person any right to have a *permanent structure* of this description in her garden for living and sleeping purposes? I think not.

In any case, I shall esteem it a great personal favour if you will put a stop to what I consider to be a perfect and most objectionable nuisance."



"Dear Sir,

Dont you think its time no 9 had a bigger place if you would kindly see to that we would all be pleased as she is a pest here for she has caused trouble with telling wicked lies about no 13 and she ought to be stoped her and no 10 got no 13 out on the garden on monday last and between the two of them the woman didnt know how to move and what they didnt say and we know its all lies about she has wrote down the Town Hall about them and no 10 ought to know better for her husband works there and shouting out about no 13 is no good and all this caper they ought to be stoped at it for no 9 has got a gent of 15 stoppin in the kitchen and a boy nearly 14 and others in all she has got 6 sleeping in the one room boys and girls dont you think its time it was a stop to and she cant

leave no 13 alone so will you please write and tell them its not no 13 that writes down to the Town Hall but no 13 is coming down if its not stop or she is going to somming them for slander if its not put a stop to."



"Dear Sir,

I am writing to ask you if you would mind asking Mrs. — to stop her gossip as she is causing untold harm about one woman in the flats about what she is going to do she caused trouble with Mrs. — and now with someone else there will always be trouble while she is there so I am asking you if you can stop her this is not from the flats from an outsider."



"Oh Chief of the Street Lighting Dept.—The Street Lamp Outside No. 8—10 Queen's Road has distinguished itself by extinguishing itself. Lighten our darkness we beseech thee and be thou a light unto our paths."

"At the corner of Westwood Avenue,
Theres a lamp that I fear is avin you,
It shines when its light,
And goes out in the night,
And is very annoying to have in view."

No charge. This might win an Austin



"Dear Sirs,

Would you please send a plumber to inspect our metre as there is a mouse in and it is out of hands to interfere with the metre.

Would you please send as soon as possible as it is very un-nerving to hear it squeal.

Yours etc."

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"Dear Sir,

Will you please remove the pythons from my fields as they are frightening my cows."

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"Dear Sirs,

I wish to draw your attention to the fact that in — Road, — Walk and — Road, on warm afternoons, there are such swarms of *gnats* about that they are definitely a great nuisance, and I think that the Borough Council should make arrangements that this great nuisance should be remedied."

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"Dear Sir,

By error my diamond engagement ring was wrapped up with refuse in newspaper and placed in the bin. I traced the dustman who collected the bin and he mentioned he will inform the dust instructor.

I trust the ring will be traced.

Yours faithfully."

"Dear Sir,

I wish to lodge a complaint as follows: My next door neighbours at No. 71 own a parrot, which is causing a great annoyance to us. We can get no rest for the continual squaking, which is encouraged by



its owner. Particularly is this noticed on Sundays when having done a weeks work we need a little rest. Also there is a baby in this house which needs sleep midday, and which, unfortunately owing to the noise caused by the Parrot, it cannot get. Is it fair that we should have to put up with this continual nuisance? I understand that you have it in your power to deal with people who annoy their neighbours, if this is so I should be extremely obliged if you will extend your power in this direction.

Yours faithfully."

"Dear Sir,

I am sorry I cannot pay the rent man this week as I have been in bed with the Doctor, but will do my best next week."

"Dear Sir,

Just a line to you to ask you if you mind doing me a great Favour by stopping one of your Dustman Mr. — of — Street going home at 3- $\frac{1}{2}$ nearly every day and upsetting the person down stairs it as ben sonething terrible to put up with I always thought every Man on the Council as to werk 5 o'clock but he do not he is home every day and in and out 3 parts of the day he goes in with a Sack of Brass and rags out of the Dust which is not write where their is children their is children down stairs I do know for sure and a quite Little Woman to live with it is very Miserable to Live near it and have to put up with So Do Try and do your very Best to make things Better as I pay Rates and Taxies to Oblidge

Yours Truly,

MR. —."

"Dear Sir,

I wish to make a complaint to you concerning the great annoyance caused to my wife and I and children by the incessant crowing and cackling of fowls during the whole night, thereby depring us of our proper rest. Your kind intervention in this matter would greatly oblige,

Yours sincerely,

A 30 YEAR OLD RATEPAYER."



Sometimes the mere way in which an envelope is addressed may cause amusement. Here, for example, is a list sent to me by a Superintendent Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, showing some of the numerous titles with which his correspondents have honoured him from time to time:

The Death General, Newcastle, Staffs.

Death of Registrar, Newcastle, Staffs.

Superintendent of Registertrar of Newcastle District
Births & Deaths.

Regesterer, Newcastle underline, Staffiger.

Regusture of Births & Deaths.

Regchester, Newcastle.

The Custodian of the Marriage Register, New-
castle.

Clerk to the Ass Essment Committee, Newcastle.

Reg. Unionion Offices, Newcastle.

District Clerk, Public Ass Department, Newcastle.

Clark to Ruler Council, Newcastle.

Gardines Commetta Ofcece (Guardians Committee
Office), Croft Street, Newcastle.



Here is an ingenuous letter addressed to a Superin-
tendent Registrar:

"Dear Sir,

Will you kindly cancell that marriage between ——
and —— as she as sent me my freedom by Post as I

dont want a life of misery with her entered in 7 Aug.
1934.

Yours turley,

—— (Man, aged 64.)”



Parties are often upset during a marriage ceremony when asked to repeat the words “lawful impediment.” “Awful peppermint” has been said on more than one occasion, but the palm must be given to a regimental cook in the Somerset Light Infantry, who took the lady to be his “Awful wedded wife.”

It is also a common occurrence for the bride or bridegroom, when repeating the words of the marriage ceremony after the Superintendent Registrar, to say, “that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, John Smith, should not be *drawn into* matrimony with Jane Brown” (instead of “joined in”).



The stories about officials which many correspondents have kindly sent to me seem to be divided, like ancient Gaul, into three parts. There are stories about a Town Clerk's Department, about a Medical Officer of Health's Department, and about a library. Why more departments of the Council have not been represented I really don't know. I have arranged them in the order named.

I. TOWN CLERK'S DEPARTMENT
"OVERHAUL OF TOWN CLERK":

Considerable amusement was created at a meeting of the Dunedin City Council when Councillor Begg



stated that an elderly lady had informed him that she understood that the Town Clerk was to be renovated and cleaned. Councillor Begg said that it was an amusing example of how some ratepayers misread the Committee reports. The misconception had arisen because the lady had misread a clause dealing with the cleaning and overhaul of the town clock, and as a result she was somewhat perturbed regarding the Town Clerk's condition. "I am pleased to say," inter-

jected Councillor Marlow, "that the Town Clerk is in no need of an overhaul."

THE SPORTSMAN:

Old Johnston had once played cricket for England. He looked rather like W.G. without the beard in appearance, and had a voice and mien in keeping with his stature. He was the Deputy Town Clerk, at the age of sixty, of a prosperous northern city. He had only one blot on an existence usually serene. That blot was a southern Town Clerk with an imperfect idea of law, a social ambition of most pretentious degree, and an Oxford manner in the worst sense. Although old Johnny spent Monday and Tuesday in every week closed to callers from the Lord Mayor downwards doing the football coupons in the Sunday papers by fifties, he contrived during the rest of the week to do both his own work and the greater part of the Town Clerk's work. And, in fairness to Johnny, he did it all pretty well—even if he carried on a blasphemous commentary meanwhile on the interferences of his senior. It was only occasionally that the smouldering volcano burst into flame.

One morning he thumped into the room of the Senior Assistant Solicitor. If foam did not froth from his mouth, it was only for lack of foam to froth.

"Old fool! Old fool!" he thundered.

Roberts, the Senior Assistant, looked up laughing.

"What's the old man done now?" he asked.

"What's he done! He's been up at the Ministry—then comes back here and says they've been trying to pick his brain—to pick *his* brain, the perisher!"

He choked with rage, magnificent in his contempt. "To pick *his* brain, gentlemen—and the hell of a long pin they'd want for that!"

He thundered out. Good old Johnny: but his cup was not full for that day. About four o'clock (it was a Tuesday) he emerged from his sanctum with a small leather bag, his hat and coat on. Old Councillor Price, nosing round in the way that certain Councillors have, passed him in the outer office, and saw the bag—and the hat and coat. He sniggered.

"It's a nice life, a Council official's, Mr. Johnston," he said in a somewhat unpleasant tone.

Johnny stopped and stared at him, his pause creating an impressive silence.

"Mister Councillor Price, if you saw the work I have in that bag"—he placed the bag impressively on the counter—"you would moderate your tone."

Price blurted out an apology and fled. Johnny turned slowly to us youngsters.

"Now, me lads, that's the way to treat your Council. Stand no nonsense."

He opened the bag slowly and displayed to us the contents. Two bowls balls and a pair of shoes.

"So that's bowls to him," he said.



A WARNING TO LOVERS—NOTICE ISSUED BY AN URBAN
DISTRICT COUNCIL:

“Resolved that ‘kissing-gates’ be erected along —— public path, and that the necessary warning notices be exhibited.”

A STERLING FELLOW:

Extract from a letter from an employment seeker:
“. . . My qualifications are as follows: Height 5' 10½". Chest (normal) 38". Weight (deflated) 12st. 5lb.”

The subtle influence of currency problems!

A DISCONCERTING ANSWER:

Candidates were being interviewed for an appointment. The Chairman asked one candidate:

“Are you temperate?”

“No, sir,” came the reply. “I am on the permanent staff.”

APPLICANT FOR COUNCIL HOUSE:

“Can I have a nouse or a nut?”

(A house or a hut.)

Lad in Clerk's Office is verbally instructed to “indent” in the Requisition Book for “Ink Erasers.” At the Committee Meeting the book appears with the following entry: “Six Inky Razors.”

TRIALS OF A RATE COLLECTOR:

In a certain district in the West Riding of Yorkshire

a rate collector was pursuing his vocation of delivering the rate demand notes, and one of the deliveries was to a house situate in a remote part on the hillside.

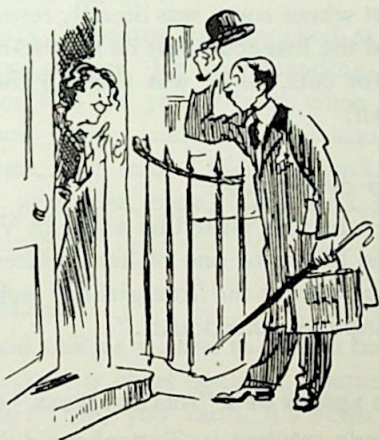
The lady occupant of the house noticed the rate collector some distance away, and promptly went to lock the front door and also the back door. The rate collector, on arrival, knocked at the front door, but got no response, and he proceeded to attempt to gain admission round at the back door, with the same result. So he returned to the front door, and attempted to push the rate demand note under the door—there being no letter-box—but as he attempted to push it under the door the lady occupant was blowing it back with a pair of bellows. He then attempted the same process at the back door, with the same result. Whereupon the rate collector exclaimed to himself, "I'm damned if I'd pay rates for a house as draughty as this."

INQUIRIES AT A TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE:

One morning an unkempt figure arrived at the inquiry office of the Town Clerk, and was attended to by a new office boy. After a great deal of puzzling cross-examination by the boy the latter disappeared into the far reaches of the Typists' Room, and approached one of the senior members and said: "I say, I've got a fellow outside here who I don't know what to do with. He wants to know where he has to go for his Natural Exertion Papers." (Naturalization papers.)

A registration form in which a man had inserted his occupation as a "Boozers' Labourer" caused a deal of comment, but on inquiry being made it was found that it was his term for a barman.

In another registration form a woman put down her occupation as "Housekeeper acting as Wife."



"YOU'RE THE DRAINS, AIN'T YER?"

II. PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT EXPERIENCES OF THE SANITARY INSPECTOR:

When the Sanitary Inspector knocks at the door it is usual for a child to open it with remarks somewhat on the following lines:

"Mum, 'ere's the Sanitary"; or

"Mum, 'ere's the Council's what's 'is name"; whilst one woman greeted the Inspector with:

"'Ullo, mate, you're the Drains, ain't yer?"

On one occasion when the Inspector had knocked the door of a house a little vigorously he was reproached with:

"Don't knock so 'ard, you'll wake all the bugs up."

With regard to bug infestation, bugs of course always come from "next door."

One tenant whose room was literally festooned with cobwebs told the Inspector that he had heard cobwebs were good for cuts, so he was keeping them in case he cut himself.

A NEW KIND OF DISEASE:

A mother who was visited by a Health Visitor with regard to the illness of one of her children said that she didn't know what the little girl had suffered from, but it was nothing "affectionate."

UNEXPECTED RESULT OF A "HEALTH WEEK" CAMPAIGN:

A good lady resident in Tottenham didn't believe in wasting food, so she kept a "stock pot" into which went the pieces from dinner. As they were from different people's plates, however, to make sure that everything would be all right she used to put into the "stock pot" a little Condyl's disinfecting fluid.

A NEIGHBOURS' QUARREL:

A woman complained of a smoke nuisance from the kitchen chimney next door (only one floor to this part of the house). The Sanitary Inspector found that

there had been a neighbours' quarrel; the woman had thrown a pail out of her bedroom window at her neighbour, knocked off this chimney-pot, and then complained of the smoke nuisance.

THAT "FELLOW FEELING":

A Sanitary Inspector had knocked at a door and received no answer. He was standing at the gate making a note in his pocket-book when an old gipsy woman came along, leant a roll of lino against the garden fence, and said, "Well, I don't know how things are with you, mate, but I ain't sold a thing yet."

INFANT WELFARE:

A Medical Officer wished to have a baby's clothes undone so that its chest could be examined, but the mother said: "Oh, you can't, it's sewn up for the winter."

AN OBSTRUCTIONIST—WITH A REASON:

A Health Visitor called at a house where there was a baby, and found that on one foot there were two toes joined together. Quite a simple operation would have remedied the matter. The Health Visitor said to the grandmother, who was looking after the baby, "Of course, you will have the baby's foot attended to." "Oh no," replied the grannie; "what God has joined together let no man put asunder."

AN UNFORTUNATE EUPHEMISM:

Woman calling at office complaining of vermin:
 "I've had visitors in my bed during the night."

CORRESPONDENCE IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT:

A patient writes, "I keep in fairly good health and a pretty fit condition due to the oversight of my panel doctor, Dr. —."

It would have appeared a wonderful piece of "co-ordination and control," but unfortunately it was *not* this particular patient on whom the doctor reported "He has not been to see me for a long time—I think he does well."

"MENS SANA . . ."

A Sanitary Inspector was trying to persuade a Smallpox Contact to go to our shelter for a disinfectant bath. He refused, and said angrily, "I don't want a barf, besides I 'ad one last year."

ALERT RESPONSE BY A PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIAL:

A Public Health Officer was reading out to his Committee a list of requirements for the department. He read out: "1 gross corks—£3 12s." omitting to read "Bottles and corks."

A member of the Committee remarked: "They seem to be rather expensive corks."

With consummate presence of mind the officer

replied: "Oh, the bottles are included with the corks!"

"THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM":

Elected members of a local authority have often the faculty of detecting weak spots in the business they are dealing with.

Among a pile of accounts and schedules occurred a bill for a few shillings for a metronome. A Committeeman, poring over the sheets unconcernedly so it seemed, stopped at this item: "Hullo! what is this for—have we started a jazz band?"

Hastily the Medical Officer scanned the account.

"Yes," he said slowly, "the instrument is usually associated with music, but in this instance it was bought to serve as a 'timer' for X-ray exposures. The cost was a few shillings as against some £19 for a specialized timer for an X-ray set."

COMPENSATION:

A distinguished Japanese doctor was being conducted over some of the hospitals and clinics of a County Council. He inquired what salary was paid to the Chief Medical Officer at the Ministry of Health, and was informed £3,000 a year.

"The doctor who holds a corresponding position in Japan only gets the equivalent of £600 a year," he said.

"That's very inadequate for such a responsible position," said the official who was acting as his guide.

"Oh, it isn't so bad, really," said the doctor casually. "You see, you can buy bananas seven a penny in Japan."

HEARTENING REFLECTION FOR THE SPINSTER:

"Yes," said an old Scottish grannie thoughtfully to the Health Visitor in course of conversation, "after



all, you single young ladies have the best of it, when once you have got over the shame of it."



Here are some letters addressed to the Sanitary Inspector:

"Dear Sir,

Will you be kind enough to let me have two tins of Rat-poison as my husband will be at home Saturday afternoon.

Yours truly . . ."

From Butcher to Sanitary Inspector:

"Dear Sir,

Will you please call here tomorrow as I want to kill a pig."

"Dear Sir,

I am writing to you complaining of the nuisance caused by a Baked Chestnut Vendor, who is continually shouting out all day Sunday's down — Rd., I have asked him several times to stop and he only insults me therefore as I am under the impression that Sunday street trading is illegal will you please take steps to stop nuisance as I for one resident require my rest on Sunday . . ."

"Dear Sir,

Will you be kind enough as to send one of your Gentelman along to — to look at the Drains as we do not quite know where the smells are coming from."

Another letter was addressed—whether by mistake or as a ratepayer's idea of a joke—to

The Insanitary Department,
Town Hall,

Sometimes the Public Health Department receive a cryptic message such as the following:

"I think the Sanitary man should come around the King of Belgium.¹ Top of Parish Street taint so much

¹ Presumably a public-house.

the door its them things what calls em self men what dont know what a door is for."

III. LIBRARY STORIES

BORROWER (*to assistant in Reference Library*): "'Ave yer got Dante's *Faust*?"

ASSISTANT (*politely*): "Surely you mean Goethe's *Faust*?"

BORROWER: "Ay, 'is'll do."



CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN (*to small girl wishing to join the library, and who had brought her form duly filled in*):

"What name is this? Lois?"

SMALL GIRL (*proudly*): "No, Miss, it's Loos, and these are me two brothers, Verdun and Wipers."



READER (*to reference library assistant*): "Can I have that book the young lady fetched from upstairs yesterday?"

ASSISTANT (*visualizing a stock of 60,000 volumes*): "What was it?"

BORROWER: "Eh, ah forgotten what it was, but [helpfully] it was a red 'un."



Tickets get out of date and have to be renewed.

SMALL BOY: "Please can I have a new ticket for my father, he's expired."



A library assistant was handed a slip by a messenger, upon which was written that a book called *Sicet fenomena* was wanted. No such title was known, and a Latin dictionary was consulted without result, when by some bright inspiration it appeared that a book on Psychic Phenomena was required.

S S S

"Clean hands or no books" appears as a warning in children's libraries.

A small boy with very grimy hands on being challenged by an assistant about them explained that "Please, Miss, I couldn't wash me 'ands, 'cause Mummy's using the water for washing up."

S S S

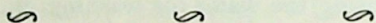
The age limit for children to become borrowers was ten years, and a small boy came to the counter and said, "Please can I jine?" The librarian said, "How old are you, Tommy?" to which he replied, "I'm nine." The librarian said, "You will have to wait a bit longer as you are not old enough."

Tommy still stood there, and remarked, "Me bruvver 'as 'em" (meaning books). The next query was "How old is he?" which brought forth the reply "He's nine." The librarian, rather surprised, said "Are you twins?" After some consideration Tommy replied, "No, we ain't twins, he's a munf older nor me"!

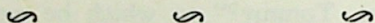
S S S

The "IN" and "OUT" wickets in open-access libraries are controlled by self-locking latches, which are released by the assistant by means of a foot latch, which is not noticeable to the borrower.

A dear old lady came in one day, chose a book, and duly brought it to the counter to have it stamped by the assistant. Before the assistant could stamp it the old lady began pushing the wicket to get out. Having stamped the book the assistant released the latch, and the wicket opened. The old dear departed, but in a few moments returned, and putting her head round the side of the screen said in a jovial tone to the assistant, "I believe you were a-teasing of me"!

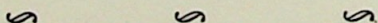


A child came in one day, and brought a book back for her mother with the message, "Please, Mother wants 'Squeaky' ('Queechy'), and if you haven't got 'Squeaky,' will you send her 'The Wide, Wide World.'"



Years ago, when Hall Caine's *The Christian* was very popular, a borrower grumbled because she had been unable to find it on the shelves. She was asked if she had looked in the right place, and said, "Yes, I always look there," and pointed to the shelves containing theology.

Another borrower asked quite seriously for *King Solomon's Minds* (mines) from the same class.



A WRONG IMPRESSION:

A tramp walked into a public library, and entered a room by a door marked "Reference Library."

TRAMP: "A pint, please."

LIBRARIAN: "This is a library, not a public-house."

TRAMP: "It says 'Refreshments' on the door."



Here is a copy of a letter received by a librarian about a book entitled *The Angel*, by B. M. Croker:

"B. M. Croker's *Angel* has been sent to the Sanitary Authority for disinfection."

CHAPTER V

ELECTIONS

HERE is a group of stories and incidents connected with elections—in the past as well as in the present.

I. THE PAST

Extract from the diary of Benjamin Rogers (an eighteenth-century parson farmer):

“Jan. 27th 1731.—The Election for Bedford began about 10 in the morning, and ended the 29th about 4 in the afternoon. The Candidates were Sir Jeremy Vanacker Sambrook of Bush-Hill near London, whose estate is said to be 1200 l. pr. Ann., and whose Uncle is Said to have as large an Estate and a great deal of ready money all of which will be Sir Jeremys at his sd Uncle’s decease; he is abt 28 years old as I suppose, and a little man. The other was Dr. Tho: Brown of Arsley, by some not tho’t to be Qualified, by respect of encumbrances on his Estate. The Election was carried on with great Partiality on the Drs. side. After the writs bore date, the Mayor with a majority of the Aldermen agreed to make a great Number of Burgesses and Freemen to strengthen the Party; 84 were said to be Nominated and Voted; but some of them not coming in, the Number of Burgesses and Freemen sworn is said to be betwixt 50 and 60 (six of which

sworn Burgesses were Clergymen). A good many of which were sworn during the Election viz. after the writ bore date. They were made pretty soon to gain time for this base practice. Which adjournment Sir Jeremy always protested against and demanded the poll to be continued. The Whigs also would not allow the Certificate men to poll, 37 of which would have poll'd for Sir Jeremy, and 16 only for Dr. Brown; except those that were sent from one parish to another within the Town of Bedford, which were very few. Also they would not allow men to vote who liv'd in Town-Houses, tho they paid full Rent for Same, most of which (being about 9 or 10) would have poll'd for Sir Jeremy. There were also several Notes, and one Letter under Young Mr. Edward's Hand (which he is said, indirectly to acknowledge to be his) promising either money or the payment of Debts etc., Some of which were produced in open Court. The Sum of the Poll on both sides was 719. Sir Jeremy having, after all their tricks and foul practices, a majority of 31 according to the check poll and 29 according to the mayor's poll."

*"September the 16th 1747.—*Was the Election for Common Council Men. The Duke of Bedford was violently bent to bring the Corporation under his power, to which purpose a Creature of his was to be elect'd Mayor. But that not being to be done without Great Violence He dropt it, not being able to nominate a person for candidate. He bestir'd himself mightily,

and when he could not corrupt 3 of the Aldermen, viz. Mr. Walter, Mr. Russell, and Mr. Hornbuckle, to Whom He had made great Offers, he muster'd all his Forces, which appeared after a Tedious Pole. We were kept in the Hall from about 11 a Clock to 6 in the Evening but all was pretty quiet. They made several Burgesses and Freemen the week before to



secure themselves against the Duke, who, they knew was like to bribe high having the Election so much at Heart."



"A LIVELY ELECTION

"Yesterday the bustle of the Elections suffered no abatement. In London, Westminster, and at the Borough of Southwark the voters who gave their suffrages were numerous, but the hissings and hootings in front of the hustings partook of that Saturnalian

licence which, on all occasions, distinguishes our popular elections. A great effort was made yesterday in Westminster to bring up single votes for Sir Murray Maxwell, and a great number of plumpers were also given for Sir Samuel Romily, as in the early part of the day the Electors met with no interruption the hustings being perfectly easy of access. Mr. Hunt was chiefly occupied in traversing the Hustings and raising objections to votes given to other candidates. His flag and *Bonnet-rouge* were exhibited towards the close of the Poll. . . . Sir Francis Burdett, we understand, has left town for Bath. Had he come forward and canvassed, unconnected with his present Committee, we are persuaded, he and Sir Samuel Romilly would be at the head of the Poll. Sir Murray Maxwell was on the Hustings during the proceedings of the day. His right eye is covered with green silk, in consequence of the hurt which he received on Thursday. In the City the contest proceeds with great spirit, but not unattended with tumult and some violence. The Hall was crowded in the extreme, and part feelings paid little respect to propriety or decorum. Blows were struck and one of the Marshalsmen was assaulted." (*Morning Advertiser*, June 20, 1818.)

S S S

"WESTMINSTER ELECTION

"Mr. Hunt first presented himself and his appearance was the signal for the usual uproar. He began by

alluding, in very coarse terms, to a horse-whipping scene, which had been acted in the hustings that morning, in which he and Mr. Dowling of the Observer Office, were the principal performers; and in which it is commonly supposed that he had played the part of a sufferer. This he denied, and stated some circumstances relative to the affray. The course of his narrative, although he enlivened it by denominating his adversary 'raw head and bloody bones,' was interrupted by the loudest cries of 'Coward, white feather, off, off!' He was ready, if any of those hissing cowards would come forward, to meet him in a ring amongst them all. (General hooting.)" (*The Times*, July 4, 1818.)



"THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE U.S.A.

"The Reverend John Buckley implored male voters to respect female moral superiority by making sure that it wouldn't be soiled and degraded by putting a bit of paper in a ballot box.

"The Honourable George Hoare begged the men to let female moral superiority purify politics by voting . . ."

(From the *Mauve Decade*, by Thomas Beer.)



"Barefaced bribery is not a bad thing, in its way. The voter got hard cash and the candidate provided

it; whereas the voter only gets wild promises now, and these always cost the country a good deal, even if they do no good to anybody. Moreover, when the voter could be bought, there was not the same necessity for cramming him with lies. With his pocket full of money and no illusions in his mind, he went gaily to the poll, feeling that it was all a festival at which he was an honoured guest. And in very many places it was very little else." (*From Small Talk at Wreyland*, by Cecil Torr.)

II. THE PRESENT

FLATTERING—VERY!

At a recent Parliamentary election a voter entered one of the polling stations. Standing in front of the Presiding Officer's desk, he eyed both Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk for some moments with considerable disapproval, and finally addressing them both asked, "Now which of you two gentlemen is the Conservative candidate?"



MISGUIDED PATRIOTISM

OLD LADY IN POLLING STATION (*to policeman*): "This'll 'elp to keep that Bolshie out. I 'aven't arf put a cross against 'is name!"



In a polling station for a Municipal Election the Poll Clerk had given the lady her ballot paper, and

the Presiding Officer stood watching her discreetly as she laboriously marked it, as he thought, according to the verbal instructions from the Clerk, namely, to place a cross against two of the six names upon it.

Eventually she left the booth, carefully folding the paper, and just as methodically pressed it down into the ballot box.

Then turning to the Presiding Officer she said, "I've bin an' voted for all of 'em, mister, but it don't matter, do it? Any'ow, I've put me name an' address on the back, if yer want me."



SCENE: POLLING STATION, ELECTION DAY

A poor old woman had been given her ballot paper; obviously very short-sighted, she was holding this up close to her eyes. The Presiding Officer, noticing her difficulty, said, "Can I give you any assistance, madam?"

She beamed on him, and replied, "Well, I'm only getting my Old Age Pension and a little Parish Relief."



LIMERICK

At a recent Town Council election,
The Mayor gave a curious direction,
That only those vote
Who are able to quote
The Ballot Act section by section.



THE BEST SIDE

Sambo happened to be in a town in Ohio on election day. In the afternoon an acquaintance met him.

"Has you voted, Sambo?" he asked.

"Yassir, I's voted."

"How did you vote?"

"Well, boss, it was dis way. I meets a Republican in th' street an' he gibs me 'leven dollars to vote for his man. An' I meets a Democrat an' he gibs me seven dollars to vote for his man. So I voted for th' Democrat."

"But the Republican gave you the most money."

"Yassir, dat's just th' p'int. I voted for dem Democrats because dey was least corrupt."

CHAPTER VI

AUDIT

(NOTE.—The accounts of local authorities (except Boroughs and County Boroughs which have elective auditors) are audited by District Auditors appointed by the Minister of Health. A District Auditor has full power of disallowance (except in the case of expendi-



ture expressly sanctioned by the Minister of Health), surcharging (i.e. compelling members of an authority to pay themselves for expenditure illegally made on behalf of their Council), and of compelling the production of all necessary documents.

ADVICE TO A DISTRICT AUDITOR

“My advice to you,” said Mr. John Burns, addressing a newly appointed District Auditor, “is to keep an eye on the workhouse master who wears spats.”

AN UNFAMILIAR BOOK

A District Auditor had been pressing the overseers (an odd class of people, now extinct) in his district to keep banking accounts and to produce the pass-books at his audits. At one of these he observed an overseer approaching him with an expression of satisfaction on his face. "There," he said, tendering a small and rather dusty yellow book, "there is my pass-book." The Auditor looked at it, and saw that it was entitled *The Haunted House*. "Dear me," said the overseer when his attention was called to this. "See, it is my daughter's Sunday School prize. I keep them both upon the mantelpiece."

S S S

A certain large institution had an influx of foreign medical officers, sent over a period of several years by a kind Ministry of Health. The visitors came from such places as Japan, Poland, Italy, Egypt, India, Sweden, etc.

The Medical Superintendent had on his estate a large lake which he wished to make pleasanter, so among other improvements he brought some Egyptian ducks.

In due course he was challenged by the Auditor. Why had he purchased Egyptian ducks?

With no proper defence, he spoke the first thought that came to him: "They were to make the foreigners feel more at home." And it passed muster.

S S S

A very aged man, an assistant overseer, used regularly for years to take out of his pocket a pair of handcuffs and place them on the table during the examination of his accounts. The Auditor raised no objection to this peculiar action. The real objection had been made many years before by a former Auditor, who disallowed the cost of the purchase of these same wristlets as being unnecessary. They were purchased for the use of the parish constable, a man of peaceful disposition and no fighter, residing in a village where the whole of the few houses lay clustered round the parish church, and the inhabitants of which were never known to be out of bed after eight o'clock. The presence of the handcuffs at each successive audit was understood to intend to perpetuate the protest of the parish to the humiliation under which they had been made to suffer—a parish constable without cuffs. "What about these, sir?" the poor old man would every time inquire, as he noticed the approaching completion of his books; "do you think you could get them in?"



SAY IT WITH FLOWERS

A parish official who occupied his time during the day as a florist, and in the evenings in wrestling with the rate-books of a troublesome parish, was accustomed to bring to the audit with his incompleated books a bouquet of the choicest flowers, handing the

gift to the Auditor with great courtesy and politeness. "His propitiary offering," observed the Auditor in an aside as he accepted the gift and promised to take it home to his wife.



There are to be met now and again persons peculiarly unable to make any kind of mental reckoning, their one recourse being to present the problem to themselves in ocular form, that being the one form in which their reasoning powers can be brought into action. There are others in whom the reasoning powers are the reverse.

On one occasion an Auditor happened to turn over the unappropriated leaves of a Parish Council cash-book, and found this written note: "Twenty six pound ten from thirty four pound three and nine—Seven pound fifteen. This is discrepancy."

What the Clerk of the Council was illustrating to himself was that the seven pounds fifteen he had in hand did not balance his accounts and he had too much.



This same gentleman (like others) found his reasoning powers reaching a crisis on attacking the financial statement. The item which gave him the most trouble was the sum of seven shillings and ninepence, the cost of some small repairs to a well. He must have felt a thrill of delight when he discovered that this very elaborate official statement obligingly

provided for this very item. The item was placed firm and sure against the heading "Sinking Fund."



A workhouse master had a very curious habit at almost every audit of placing his cash account before the examining Clerk and calling attention to certain small items of receipt which he had "inadvertently" omitted to enter and pay to the Treasurer, but which he had since—to use his own expression—duly entered and paid to the bank, that was to say, that very morning. This peculiar behaviour appeared to be growing into a habit, and acting on the twin maxims *qui s'excuse, s'accuse*, and *falsum in uno, falsum in omni*, the accounts of this officer were subjected to what, in its then infancy, was a reality, but which in its present-day maturity has become to be looked upon by many as little more than a counterfeit and a misnomer—an "internal" examination. The result was, as might be supposed, disastrous both to the official's accounts and the officer himself.



It is rather unusual for an official to be brought up on a Home Office permit from prison in the company of two warders to enable him to be present at the examination of his accounts. It is perhaps well that the incident was uncommon, for on the occasion related the public ovation manifested upon the defaulting official as he walked, accompanied by his

two travelling companions, through the streets of the little town back to the railway station to prison was such as to dislocate the business of the town for several hours. "Good old Bertie" were the words of the greetings accorded the hero. Such is the unaccountability of the public mind in discriminating between popularity and criminality. Nearly a thousand pounds of public money was the amount involved. This gentleman would appear to have successfully followed the example of his prototype, the unjust steward in the parable, by making himself friends of those who, when put out of his stewardship, were likely to receive him, if not into their homes, at least into their good opinion—which was worth much more to him.



It was necessary for the Auditor seriously to reprimand an assistant overseer (a very aged and personally attractive gentleman, the wearer of a frock-coat and cravat) by reason of the increasing balance permanently remaining in his hands. "Now where is this money?" asked the Auditor. The old gentleman, sitting opposite the Auditor, leaned forward and whispered, "I will tell you the truth, sir; I will tell you where the money is; it is in the Abbey belfry."

This official was by trade a church bell-hanger, and he had for some time been engaged in the partial rehanging of the Abbey bells of the neighbouring city.



A workhouse master, being asked by an Auditor to explain a rather heavy item in his cash-book under the significant name of "Beechams," replied, "It's quite all right; we have done it for years: we beer the beggars first and pill them afterwards."

S S S

At a certain audit one of the rate collectors constantly presented a very heavy list of arrears. Being in the town over Sunday, the Auditor (a very facetious gentleman) accompanied the Clerk to church. On seeing the rate collector making his way down the nave with the church collection plate in his hand, the Auditor whispered to the Clerk, "He is going to take up the recoverable arrears."

S S S

At a certain workhouse the handyman at the entrance door (a sort of quasi-official porter) was an admitted solicitor. He devoted to his unimportant duties a very affable attention, and would direct the carrying out of small errands for the Auditor and his staff—which is not unusual for a wayfaring Auditor. On one occasion an Assistant Auditor happened to mention to his chief that he had commissioned this officer's assistance in sending a pair of boots into the town for repairs. "You may be said to have placed your feet in your solicitor's hands," he replied.

S S S

AT THE AUDIT

CHIEF LEDGER CLERK (*a dandy*) to the Auditor:
"Yes, sir, the dashed ledger still doesn't balance by twopence—it must be a slip somewhere."

(*Confidentially*) "Tell you what, sir, I'll pay in the dashed twopence, and that'll get over it."



(District Auditor has been "slating" the Clerk to the X Parish Council because his cash-book showed a deficiency.)

THE CLERK (*a very old man*): "I know them two sides don't quite agree, but [*anxiously*] you surely ain't going to worry about that, are you, sir?"



In a workhouse master's cash-book appeared this item: ("A Jack £6"). Upon inquiry it was found that the item referred to the purchase of a new Union Jack for the workhouse flagstaff.



In a workhouse master's cash-book appeared the item: "Cash lost to Bank £2."

The explanation was that the master had sent a "very reliable" inmate to the bank to change two sovereigns into silver, and had from that day to the date of the audit seen neither the very reliable inmate nor the silver.



A MUNICIPAL "POOH-BAH"

The creation of Parish Councils aroused a sense of great importance in the breasts of the village rector and his churchwarden-blacksmith and others who led the van in parochial affairs. In many parishes the rector or vicar was Chairman of the Council, and, what was more important, its Clerk also. The financial statement of the Parish Council is (or was then) a very imposing production and commanded the united efforts of the whole Council to prepare for presentation to the Auditor. The statement contained specific headings or sections for every particular item of receipt and expenditure lawful for a Parish Council to entertain. At the most half a dozen of these headings comprehended the activities of an ordinary Parish Council; the rest had no application.

The Chairman-Clerk of a small Parish Council, a clergyman and scholar of high university repute, submitted the final statement of his Council for examination. The District Auditor looked at it, and noticed that every single item with the exception of three or four had been struck entirely out with the pen and the letters "ROT" inserted in the margin opposite each deletion.

"I hope it is correctly filled up," said the Rector. "I found it very perplexing." The Auditor replied that the filling up was all right, but that it was the strikings out that attracted his notice, more especially the unusual observation in the margin: "ROT," he

remarked, was hardly the word to apply to the necessary deletions—however true it might be.

The rector was very much surprised at the Auditor's rebuke, and pointed out to him that the offending letters were the initials of his name.

CHAPTER VII

A "MIXED BAG" OF STORIES

In this chapter I have put all the odd anecdotes which do not seem to fit into any of my title headings.

Let me plunge at once *in medias res*.

THE WILY INSPECTOR

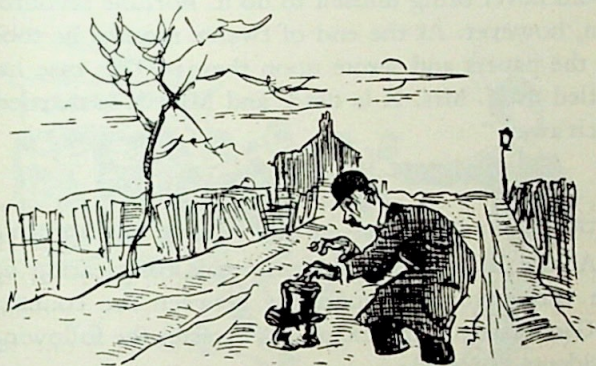
One of the Ministry of Health's Inspectors had to hold a local inquiry in a remote part of Wales. He was warned that people would endeavour to embarrass him by declaring that they could only give evidence in Welsh. The Inspector was on the look-out for them. The first two witnesses gave their evidence in English. The third declared that he could only speak Welsh. The Inspector let him go on for a time, and then remarked to him that there was white on his shoulder. The witness proceeded to brush it off. There was a laugh in the Court. The Inspector then said: "Now then, all those who have laughed at my little joke will please give their evidence in English."



DOWN IN THE WORLD

In a rapidly growing borough notorious for its unmade roads a member of the Town Council was pursuing his way home after a long and stormy

sitting. The night was dark, and the rain streamed in torrents. The Councillor's way was along one of the unmade roads. In the course of his journey he espied in the middle of the road a dark object which, upon closer investigation, proved to be a silk hat. Influenced, doubtless, by the cry of economy which had been

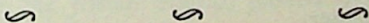


dinned into his ears at the meeting he had left, he seized the hat to bear it home. Great was his surprise to hear a voice from below:

"What are you doing with my hat?"

"Why, what are you doing down there?" asked the Councillor.

"Driving a hansom cab," came back the answer.



AN UNWILLING ARBITRATOR

An acute difference arose between a lady Inspector of the Local Government Board and a lady Guardian

prominent in Poor Law circles. Failing to settle the quarrel themselves, the ladies referred the matter to the Secretary of the Department. The subject-matter was exceedingly distasteful to him, and, moreover, he was given to Fabian tactics. From time to time his private secretary brought the case before him, but he would never bring himself to do it. Fortune favoured him, however. At the end of twelve months he took up the papers and wrote upon them: "This case has settled itself. Mrs. X is dead, and Miss Y is married. Put it away."



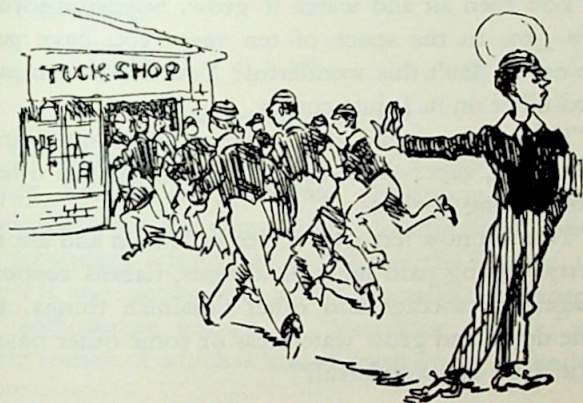
ALTERATIONS OF AREAS—WHAT PEOPLE REALLY MIND

At the Inquiry into the proposals for clearing up the very involved boundaries between the counties of Gloucester, Warwick, and Worcester the following incidents occurred:

- (a) A resident in one of the villages to be transferred from Gloucester to Worcester objected to the transfer on the ground that the village was built by Gloucester men of Gloucester stone.
- (b) Another objected to the transfer because of the ineptitude of the Worcester County Cricket Club and the brilliance of Hammond for Gloucester.
- (c) And a further resident objected because Worcester was colder.

A proposal to unite two parishes was objected to

by one of them on the ground that the other parish had no public-house. The reasoning that led to this objection is obscure, but it is thought to be that if the parish boundary were removed the influx of visitors to the public-house would be increased, thereby causing overcrowding.



THRIFT—BY A FINANCIER OF FOURTEEN

The following views on the virtue of saving were recently expressed in a letter to his father by a fourteen-year-old schoolboy. The father (who happened to be Sir Josiah Stamp) passed them on to a meeting of the City of Westminster Savings Committee:

"I forgot to tell you last week about some laddie who turned up at school and gave us ye chat about

National Savings, in consequence of which I am going to save. How much and how long I do not know.

"Apparently, the idea is to refrain from buying all the things you want to buy and put the money thus cunningly obtained where you can't get at it, even if you want to. This is called thrift.

"You then sit and watch it grow. Supposing you have £50. In the space of ten years you have got £50 os. 6d. Isn't this wonderful? You don't even put weed-killer on it. It just comes.

"Then you expend the initial sixpence on taxes, super-taxes, super-super-taxes, hyper-taxes, and other labour-saving devices.

"You are now left with a nice little sum and are at liberty, having paid rents, land dues, habeas corpus, pillage, and soccage and other villainish things, to settle down and grow watercress or some other naval plant. Isn't life wonderful?"



THINGS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN PUT OTHERWISE

CHAIRMAN (*paying tribute to the work of a Town Clerk who has acted as Honorary Clerk to a Joint Advisory Committee*): "I have really been astonished at the efficiency displayed by the Honorary Clerk during the past year . . ."



A junior clerk was instructed to send a reminder to a Corporation who had received a letter from the Ministry about sewage disposal.

He was directed, he said, to refer to the Minister's letter about the disposal of sewage matter by the Corporation and to inquire what steps they had taken in the matter.



"METHODIST GOTHIC"

Sir George Lunn, Chairman of the Newcastle upon Tyne Education Committee, presenting a recommendation for the completion of Rutherford College (a secondary school), said: "When the College was built it was incomplete; in fact, it was like that species of architecture known as 'Methodist Gothic,' the main feature of which is lack of finish owing to funds!"



THE OTHER B.B.C.

A Bermondsey Borough Council road sweeper was pushing his barrow eastwards along Tooley Street on a miserable, wet, and unpleasant day not long ago.

There was a pause in the traffic stream, a bus pulled up alongside the sweeper, and the driver of the bus, seeing the letters B.B.C. on the barrow, shouted out: "D'you belong to the same firm that broadcast this bloomin' weather last night?"

To which the sweeper replied: "Yus. . . . And

I'm the depression you 'eard abaht last night . . .
now moving eastwards!"



THE PURIST

Patients suffering from tuberculosis have to make application for treatment on a printed form on which is the question: "Length of Residence in the County."

One gentleman replied: "Thirty-six feet."



ANTI-NOISE CAMPAIGN

A complaint was received from a lady with reference to noise in a playing-ground which adjoined her house. Her letter concluded with the pathetic appeal that the City Council should tie up the swings so that an old horse could go to sleep.



A QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION

A London Borough adopted as its motto "Non mihi, non tibi, sed nobis," the translation being "Not mine, not thine, but ours."

Budding or actual Borough Councillors frequently asked for the translation, and it was noticed that they misinterpreted "ours" and attributed with some disgust the ultimate ownership to the speaker as representing the Council's staff.

To allay this mistrust a young representative of the

staff adopted the translation as "Not mine, not thine, but yours," a course which seemed to have a more pleasing effect upon the inquirer even though accuracy suffered somewhat.

SECOND THOUGHTS!

The editor of a paper in a small western American town, moved to indignation at what he considered the unfair placing of certain municipal contracts, headed an article "Half the City Council are Crooks."

Threatened with a libel action, he consented to withdraw this suggestion contained in the headline. In his next issue a revised headline appeared: "Half the City Council are not Crooks."

BUNKERS

When the Southwold Golf Course was nine holes entirely on the Common, the Corporation gave permission for the Club to construct two bunkers, at 1s. per annum each. The Committee of the Club, desiring to erect four or six more bunkers, duly made application to the Council, and when the matter was being debated at the full monthly meeting one Councillor addressed the Chair thus: "Mr. Mayor, I object to the Golf Club cutting up our lovely common for these 'ere bunkers. Besides, they've got two already, and I've never seen 'em use 'em yet."

The meeting was thus put in good humour, and the application was granted, one dissenting.



AN ALLOTMENTS STORY

A local authority in Scotland had acquired an extremely rough piece of land, which they allowed unemployed men in their district to use for allotment purposes. One particular unemployed man put his heart and soul into his allotment, and after about a year's work transformed his piece of land beyond recognition. A local minister, on passing by and seeing him on his allotment, remarked, "It just shows what can happen when the Almighty and man co-operate."

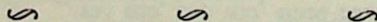
"Well," retorted the man indignantly, "I should just like ye to have seen the land when the Almighty had it to Himself."



A DRASTIC SUGGESTION

TOWN CLERK (*at close of learned lecture upon burial of the dead*): "Any questions?"

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: "Yus! We don't want no crematum, nor yet no earth-buryin'. The honly proper way is to put 'em in big drain-pipes, cement 'em well in each end and then you won't get no stink."



A NEW KIND OF SECURITY

A Chief Storekeeper and Depot Foreman wrote to a member of the Clerk's staff:

"Mr. —, dere sir. Being as I am going to South Africa next week, can you lend me £5? I can offer you good security, being as I am leaving my wife here."

The offered security was not accepted.



CELESTIAL AROMA

CHAIRMAN: "I can prove this 'ere efulent [effluent] is pure—I'm going to drink it. [He does so, from glass.] We don't want no new sooig [sewage] works at all—all you got to do is to cement down the outfall field and just put some drain pipes in for chimleys. Let the angels enjoy the smell, I says."



WANTED—A STOPES FOR THE SWANS

(Surveyor reports increase in number of swans on municipal lake, and difficulty of feeding them.)

A MEMBER: "I move, sir, that the attention of the swans be drawn to the forthcoming lectures on birth control."



FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

Applicant (with no children) for Council accommodation, now occupying two rooms and kitchenette, asks for three rooms at rent of about 12s. 6d. per week, and gives as his reasons for requiring accommodation under the Council's scheme:

"TO ALLOW FOR EXPANSION ACCORDING TO
MATRIMONY."



LAUDATOR TEMPORIS ACTI

A MEMBER (*discussing plans for Council houses*): "What do you want baths for? My father, 'e's nigh on seventy and never 'ad no bath, and Gran'fer 'e lived to nigh on ninety and 'e never 'ad no bath neither—wot's good enough for our parents is good enough for us." (Laughter, in which member fails to see the point.)



THE PENALTY FOR UNTRUTH

When a child gives evidence it is the custom for the Judge or Magistrate to say: "Now, do you know what will happen to you if you don't tell the truth?"

A bright, modern boarding-school girl, according to this story, replied: "Yes, my lord, my expenses will be disallowed."

Not so good as the older answer, "Yes, my lud, I shall go to 'ell."



TOO BAD!

A woman had been removed under a Housing Clearance Scheme from one Ward in the Borough in which poor people were entitled under an old charity to receive a hundredweight of coal to another Ward, in which the charity was not operative. On meeting the Mayor one morning she said: "Blimey, I thought there was a catch in it—we moved to t' new 'ouses and now we can't get no coals."



SOMETHING IN NAMES

An amendment of the London County Council's regulations ordained that the Council's liability in the matter of illness of the staff of certain institutions should be limited to the expenses appropriate to the official status of the patient. Presumably accounts of this sort are pending:

THE BOSS: Gnathic excision—two guineas.

HIS SECRETARY: Dental extraction—five shillings.

THE HALL PORTER: Tooth out—a bob.



A PRINCELY OFFER!

The Pier Committee of the —— Corporation offered

to allocate £000 from their Revenue Account to avoid an increase in the rates for the winter.

The Corporation did not find it necessary to take advantage of the offer. The rates will be the same as last winter—5s. 7d. . . . (Daily paper.)

Which reminds me of a joke in *Ces Messieurs de la Santé*: The ex-banker Tafard, starting to rebuild his fortunes as a night watchman, is asked by his assistant, "And what will my salary be?"

"Nothing to begin with," he replies, "and if you're successful, I'll double it!"



DE-RATING ALGEBRA

The famous algebraic formula in Mr. Neville Chamberlain's de-rating plan is thus explained:

So we take $a b$ and we multiply
By half of the square of $x + y$
We then throw in some *ad hoc* weights
And that is the way we apportion the rates.



DE-RATING

Lymm Urban District Council, Cheshire, used to pay a penny for each rat's tail brought to the offices.

The other day a man came in with a handful, and demanded a penny per tail.

THE CLERK: "We do not pay for rats' tails now."

THE RESIDENT: "You cannot please yourselves. You have to pay."

THE CLERK: "Got to? Why?"

THE RESIDENT: "Under the new de-RAT-ing Bill, of course."



A NOVEL HYMN

The school children were singing, "We can sing, full though we be."

When the teacher inquired into the matter it proved to be a mishearing of "Weak and sinful though we be."



MENTAL SUFFICIENCY

A J.P., examining mental powers of alleged mental deficients in a rural poor law institution, asked, "Now, my girl, if you had a pound and bought five shillings' worth of groceries, how much would you have left?"

No answer.

Finally the master intervened, and urged Jane to give her answer. Jane, with an offended air: "If this old fool doesn't know, I'm not going to tell him."

J.P. (*delighted*): "She's all right."

SCHOOL INSPECTOR: "What school did you attend, my boy?"

BOY: "I went to a Council School."

SCHOOL INSPECTOR: "Do you mean an elementary school of the London County Council?"

BOY: "No, I mean a special school for the mentally sufficient."



A RATEPAYER'S LITTLE JOKE

A Newbury ratepayer made out a cheque for rates, to "Rip van Winkle Ltd."

The Corporation paid the cheque into the bank and endorsed it: "Treated as a fictitious payee and placed to the credit of the Newbury Corporation." And the bank placed it to the Corporation's credit, marking the cheque: "Paid to the Corporation's account in just payment of a liability to them."

The ratepayer had his little joke, and the Corporation its rates.

Which only shows!



THE INFORMER

A Jewish man called at the Municipal Offices and requested an interview with the Electrical Engineer, as he had something of importance to communicate to that official. The Engineer being away, the Deputy Engineer saw the man, and the following conversation took place:

JEW: "Yesterday I saw a bus make some damage to an electric light standard in the main road, and I have come along to tell you about it."

DEPUTY: "Thank you, but we already know all about the accident; we were informed by the police."

JEW: "Yes, I know, I told the police."

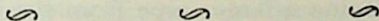
DEPUTY: "Well, what is the particular point you desired to see me about?"

JEW: "Vot about a leetle commission?" (Collapse of official.)



THE DIFFERENCE

At the time of the restoration of the Council Chamber in a County Borough a question was raised by a member of the Council, who was an undertaker by trade, as to the excessive cost of the oak panelling for the Chamber. The Architect, who was also present, agreed that the cost was high. "But, Mr. Councillor," he said, "the oak you buy has only to be on view for three days. I hope that my oak will be on view for three centuries!"



NOVEL OUTBURST OF ECONOMY IN LANCASHIRE

A Lancashire man and his wife were out walking when he noticed a gas bill on the footpath. He picked it up, took a good look at it, and turned to his wife and said:

"I'm going to pay this 'ere bill, Maggie."

"Whatever do you want to do that for, you soft thing," she said. "It isn't yours."

"No," he replied, "but there's three-and-tenpence discount, and I might as well have it as anyone else."



SEWAGE WORK IN THE COUNTRY

"Moreton was provided with a sewer in 1905. The main part of the town is on a hill between two little valleys that converge into the valley of the Wrey: and a nine-inch sewer pipe was carried down each valley to the junction of the two, and a nine-inch sewer pipe from that point to the sewage tanks some way further on, as if one nine-inch pipe would take the full contents of two pipes of that size. Moreton is a great place for thunderstorms—the conformation of the country brings the clouds that way—and the storm water comes rushing down the sewer pipes and drives the sewage along; and of course the sewer pipes were always bursting where these torrents met. Instead of laying a larger pipe from the junction to the tanks, the District Council placed a sort of safety valve above the junction, and now, whenever the pressure is sufficient, the sewage throws up a fountain there. I have gone to see the fountains at Versailles and Peterhof and other places celebrated for them, but I have never seen another fountain quite like this.

And nobody need go out of his way to see it, as it splashes out on the high road from Moreton here."

(Extract from *Small Talk at Wreyland*, by Cecil Torr.)



STORMY PRELIMINARIES TO OBTAINING A MAIN WATER SUPPLY IN THE COUNTRY

"The excitement in the village about the mains water supply has reached a stage which in any other country would necessitate the intervention of armed forces. When the locals voted for a water supply, no one apparently realized that every householder who connected up would have to pay for the cost of making the connection. The mains most properly run down one side of every street, to avoid disturbing the expensive surface. If your cottage lies on that side you score heavily, saving many yards of lead piping; if you are on the wrong side you lose. Eventually, after many excited meetings in the schoolhouse, it was decided to get a firm to contract to do the lot at a fixed charge per house. This was almost settled, on condition that over fifty householders could be secured to sign the contract, when fresh trouble developed, Farmer A, who lives on the road, vowing that he would not pay for piping to Farmer B, whose dwelling-house rejoices in a fifty-yard drive. Further trouble was to come: the few who rushed in first to connect up found that scarcely a single item of their plumbing

arrangements would satisfy the autocratic inspector. Cisterns of patterns approved in the great cities were condemned because they were not galvanized inside; roof tanks were condemned because they were not packed in sawdust lagging; overflow pipes had to be pushed through walls rather than let them deliver inside where they could be seen or heard. The whole business is due to the well-known passion of the Englishman for water running through his ceilings and down his walls, which must be combated by officialdom. Altogether we are very worked up, and scarcely anyone is taking the water: there are only twenty signatories on the contractor's list. Moreover, since we are a very free-thinking crowd, the insidious suggestion is now going the rounds that we should refuse to take the water unless we can have it through meters—like gas and electricity."

(From an article in *The Countryman*.)



AN ARISTOCRATIC WORKHOUSE MASTER

The master of a workhouse claimed to be the rightful owner of a baronetage, and uses and acted up to the title in every respect possible in his present position in ordinary life. I did not know of this noble lineal descent of the master on the occasion of my first visit, and when I sent for certain of the workhouse books they were brought and handed to me by the baronet's courier with the august message,

perfectly delivered, "Sir James presents his compliments and has sent the books required."



A MERE TRIFLE

A woman who had given notice of marriage attended at the Register Office to fix a date for the wedding. Upon referring to the notice and repeating to her the names of the parties, she said, "No, not him, but so and so," mentioning a different name from that contained in the notice. Upon being informed that she must give a fresh notice and wait another twenty-one days, she replied, "But it's the same wedding—only a different man."

ELEGY ON A FIRST VISIT TO STOKE NEWINGTON
CEMETERY

(Forwarded anonymously for the edification of
the Town Clerk)

This morn I heard a still voice say,
"Go to Stoke Newington." I thought, "Not to-day,"
But gradually became somewhat interested
And said to myself, "I'll pay—a visit."
I heard the name many times,
Tho' I've not seen its shops and houses fine,
And so when from the car I alighted
Upon my left I saw a cemetery

And walked up the road as far as the church, and
 On my way back entered thro' the cemetery gate.
 The sun was hot, there was a gentle breeze,
 As I trod the path between the trees,
 Everywhere was bright with vases of flowers,
 Gravestones, sculpturings and shady bowers.
 And I gave a fleeting glance at some of the words
 Carved on a stone which were superb,
 And shortly after the interior voice did say:
 Blessed are they which die in the Lord.
 And also felt an inclination to keep to the right,
 Then turn to the left and the other way take—
 Past shrubs and blooms and verdurous green
 Where a wild rose tree I bent underneath,
 Its delightful shading of green and pink
 Swaying gracefully in the breeze,
 And sat to rest under the shelter
 Of a protecting tree from the heat of the sun.
 "Blessed are they which die in the Lord."
 I wrote it down because it was good,
 But queried as to whether it was *which* die in the Lord
 Or whether it was *who* die in the Lord?
 When suddenly something drew my attention
 To a priest passing by a little in the distance,
 And said to myself, "Now is my chance,"
 I'll ask him, which is right of the two?
 But the priest went on towards the graveside
 Where erect he stood in peaceful attitude.

(The original of this communication—a curious
 amalgam of the schools of Gertrude Stein and Wil-

helmina Stitch—covered four pages of foolscap. It has therefore been somewhat abbreviated.)



A NOVEL CARD GAME

A local government official had been told by a friend that the U.S.S.R. had abolished the figures of kings and queens on playing cards and had substituted those of prominent local personalities.

"That's an interesting idea," he said thoughtfully. "We might develop it here. Think how jolly it would be to go nap on three aldermen and a couple of sanitary inspectors!"



A BARE GLANCE!

In his interesting book, *The London County Council from Within*, Sir Harry Haward, referring to the special Council Meetings held for the granting of music and dancing licences, writes: "I recollect an amusing incident arising out of Zaeo's performance at the old Westminster Aquarium. She used to dive from the roof into a net on the platform. At the instance of the Theatres Committee two members were said to have taken steps to verify the public statement that Zaeo was suffering from sores on her back caused by her performance. One of them (Mr. Thornton) admitted that he had, at the manager's request, seen Zaeo in the wings, but 'beyond just

giving a glance at her back he neither saw nor examined it.' The name of the other members did not transpire."



A CORPORATION DEFINED

In reply to a question set at a competitive entrance examination for juniors to a borough treasurer's office—What is a Corporation? One reply was: "A Corporation is a number of men who discuss affairs at a dinner with the Mayor and they are then carried out."



ESPRIT DE CORPS

OLD LADY (to park attendant): "Do these flowers belong to the Primula family?"

ATTENDANT (drawing himself up proudly): "No, madam, they belong to the London County Council!"

CHAPTER VIII

SUNDRY APPENDICES

NOTE.—No book dealing with local government in any shape or form, as the saying is, would be complete without at least one appendix.

To comply with the prevailing fashion, I have arranged for *The Lighter Side of Local Government* to have three appendices, and here they are:

APPENDIX I

MR. DOUGH'S DIARY

Friday.—The Municipal Councillors' Society's Dinner was a success, I think. We must have sat down about three hundred (at the Camero). We dined at 6.0 for 6.30, and so had a good evening of it. As the Guest of Honour, I sat next to the Chairman, a Mr. Honeybubble, who seemed very kind and knows a great many stories. I did not perhaps appreciate them all as much as I might have done as I could not help thinking about my speech. That is the worst of speech-making; one does not want to speak to anyone until one has spoken. However, Mr. Honeybubble did not seem to notice anything. I think he thought I was deaf, for he talked louder and louder. Apart from thinking about my speech, I always feel a little out of it with a story-teller, as I know so few stories.

Last night I tried hard to "cap" Mr. Honeybubble, but I could think of nothing except Masters' story about "That's me!" which seemed hardly suitable.

However, I was not going to let him have things all his own way, so at last I told him my favourite saying about an after-dinner speech, that it ought to be the length of a lady's dress, long enough to cover the subject but short enough to be interesting. I had intended to begin my speech with that, though it is rather daring, and it will be a warning to me not to let out my secrets again, for Mr. Honeybubble only said, "Yes, that's a dear old chestnut." Considering that to the best of my belief I made it up myself, this was rather annoying, but he was not to know that. What did put me out was that he began *his* first speech with *the identical remark*. It was greeted with roars of laughter, as it always is, but that was not much satisfaction to me, as I now had to rack my brains for another beginning. The beginning is half the battle, and I always try to get it by heart. I said to Honeybubble good-humouredly, "You have bagged my beginning," but he was so pleased with his applause that he did not seem to hear me. I was sixth on the programme, and besides the speeches there were "entertainments" which I never like, as it drags things out and one is kept on tenterhooks the *whole* evening. Besides, when songs and comedians are *sandwiched* between the speeches, one really feels like a sort of pierrot, and if the entertainers are very funny it is rather hard to have to follow them. Not that

they *were* funny, in my opinion. Indeed I thought some of them vulgar, but I was quite sorry for them, because most of the guests talked and laughed during the songs, and so did the Chairman. As I was in the place of honour all the entertainers looked straight at me while they were singing, and I thought it only polite to pretend to take an interest, but this was difficult with Honeybubble shouting anecdotes into my ear, especially as all the time I was trying to think of my new beginning. Altogether I got quite a headache, and the red wine was rather heavy. Honeybubble by the way has a very large moustache, and when he became confidential it *literally* tickled my ear.

The speaker before me, who replied for the Society, gave me what I thought was rather a good opening for a retort, something about the *seaside* Councillors having all the fun (that was what he said). Unfortunately, as sometimes happens, I could not get my quip *quite* clear in my mind. There was quite a good interval, but Honeybubble had begun a long story about his boyhood and would *not* leave me alone. My head was in a whirl. The only thing, I have found, in such a position is to take a pencil and puzzle out the joke on paper. I had to interrupt the Chairman at last and say, "Will you excuse me? I am trying to think of a joke for my speech." He said airily, "Don't you worry, Mr. Dough. Just get up and say the first thing that comes into your head. It doesn't matter what you say; the boys don't expect much."

Well, that is all very well for a man to say who

had got his speech over. I have often heard people who have not got to make a speech themselves talk as if it was the easiest thing in the world to get up and make jokes on the spur of the moment. But they would be the first to complain if one stood up and made a mess of things through not taking trouble. Personally I think out my speeches four days ahead and say them over in the bathroom. I am sure that Honeybubble was only trying to be kind, but these very kind people can be very trying sometimes. He went on talking about his boyhood, and really it was as much as I could do to keep my temper especially as his moustache in my left ear quite got on my nerves. At last he called upon one of the entertainers, a very large woman with what I believe is called a *contralto* voice. "Now," I thought, "I shall get a little quiet," and I sharpened my pencil, as that sometimes gives one an inspiration. Not a bit of it. The woman sang a song called "Caller Herrin" (a fish which I have never liked) and she *literally* stared at me all through the song. I had to pay attention, it would have seemed too discourteous to begin writing under the circumstances. At last I had to abandon the idea of my retort (whatever it was) and I decided to make do with my married-man joke which I have not used many times lately.

My one desire now was to get my speech over and done with; but, instead of calling upon me to reply for the Guests after the *contralto*, Mr. Honeybubble, without consulting me, called upon *another* entertainer.

I was furious, especially as this time it was a very vulgar comedian, who dressed up as a woman and kept everybody in fits of laughter—that is everybody else; personally I could not endure the man or see anything funny in him. However, he was certainly popular, and Honeybubble actually gave him an *encore*. So there I had to sit for another ten minutes, fuming and nervous. Not *quite* the way, I thought, to treat the Guest of Honour. Honeybubble did not seem to realize my feelings in the least; in fact, after the *encore*, he said, "There now, I have worked up a capital atmosphere for you." It was lucky that he could not read my thoughts.

It was nearly eleven when I was called upon. They gave me a very cordial reception, but after the comedian I was afraid that some of my slices of municipal history might seem a little dry. However, for the first fifteen minutes I felt that I was holding my audience very well. One or two men shouted "Speak up," which always upsets me. I have a very good carrying voice, but if people will order drinks and strike matches and cough during a speech *nobody* can make himself heard in such a large room.

Then, just as I was telling my little story about the Public Health Acts Amendment Act the Chairman pushed a menu-card in front of me, on which he had written "That's about enough." For a moment I was rather put out of my stride, as the subject is a complicated one and I had several good things still to

come. Fortunately the rest of the audience did not seem to agree with him, for about five minutes later they began to applaud me loudly, and what I thought were by no means my best remarks were greeted with long cheers. I thought that a lot of it came from the table where Masters was, which surprised me. Thus



"... PUSHED A MENU-CARD IN FRONT OF ME ..."

encouraged, I went on and gave them the whole of the speech, just as I had prepared it. It took about twenty-five minutes; but I think they were glad of some serious stuff after the singing. Masters afterwards said that they had been having a sweepstake on the length of the speeches or some such nonsense, and that I had won a prize for him with the Longest Speech. Mr. Honeybubble was the next with twenty-one minutes. I said it was not everybody who could hold an audience as long as that so late in the evening.

Masters then said that as a matter of fact he had started all the applause to make me go on longer; but I was not going to swallow that. "Now then, jealous!" I said. Quite a pleasant evening.

A. P. H.

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APPENDIX II

THE PRESS

"Mr. C—— thanked the deputation and assured them that the District Council would do everything possible for the interests of Bacton as a seaside resort. Would Bacton be prepared to meet the cost of a public lavatory?

Mr. S—— replied that he could not speak for the Parish Council, but was sure that they would consider that."—*Eastern Daily Press*.

"Interposed the Sheriff: 'All good golfers don't smoke a cigar whilst playing,' and the Lady Mayoress thereupon tenderly removed it. Next the Lord Mayor took a trial swing and narrowly missed hitting Ald. W. Green a blow that would have deposited him on the fairway. 'Ere, hold on a minute!' exclaimed the alderman, and made a hurried dash to comparative safety behind the net. Altogether it was a very happy gathering."—*Nottingham Evening News*.

"Councillor George Parbury (to Councillor Swain): 'Go on, you will put the lid on it. I know you will say something daft.' Councillor Swain: 'If I say anything daft it will be because I have had plenty of instruction in this Council.'"—City Council Meeting reported in *Leicester Mercury*.

"The action of the Mayor and Mayoress of Blackburn (Alderman and Mrs. W. Kenyon) in ordering the covering with sheeting of two statues which had been transferred from the Art Gallery to the Town



"... TENDERLY REMOVED IT ..."

Hall for the purpose of decorating the steps leading to the Mayor's Parlour is likely to raise comment at the next Council meeting. It is understood that the Mayor, while admitting that the statues are beautiful works of art, said that they were out of place, and that his views were shared by the Mayoress."—*Yorkshire Post*.

"Miss Cocks called attention to a defect in the pump at Budock Water. It seemed as if it was worn out. If something was not done they might get a serious accident in the case of elderly people, for sometimes the handle went down with a jerk and the person endeavouring to obtain water fell over it.

The Sanitary Inspector stated that the pump had been in existence nearly sixty years. It was practically worn out, but was repaired about six months ago in the hope that it would last for some time.

The Chairman expressed the opinion that the pump had not been in existence for more than forty years.

The matter was referred to the representatives for the parish, with powers to act."—*Lake's Falmouth Packet, Cornwall Advertiser, and Visitors' List.*

"To put it mildly, the cat had got amongst the pigeons, and that had caused more than a mere fluttering in the municipal dovecots. The County Clerk had thrown down the gauntlet, and the first to take up the challenge were the representatives of Irvine (appl.). By them was sent out the fiery cross calling the other burghs to battle; by them the first step was taken in the fight."—*Irvine Herald.*

"A proposal to construct a bathing-pool at Rothesay was condemned by Bailie Cunningham at a meeting of the Town Council yesterday. He declared that 79 per cent of the people who undressed spent most of the time loafing round the edge, and that half the

people who paid for admission as spectators did not go to see the swimming but to admire and criticize the anatomy of the women bathers.”—*Daily Telegraph*.

“By 22 votes to 12 Ealing Town Council last night rejected a proposal to permit Sunday morning swim-



“... FLUTTERING IN THE MUNICIPAL DOVECOTS ...”

ming in the local baths. Several members said that Sunday swimming was the ‘thin end of the edge of Sunday recreation.’ ”—*Morning Post*.

“Alderman J. Murdoch: It is most desirable that a woman teacher who is marrying, and so likely to have a family, should resign. It is not respectable to see a woman in that state in a school. When a woman

marries, her husband ought to be able to keep her; and if he can't, he should not marry her."—Herefordshire Education Committee debate reported in *Education*.

"Councillor Tombs said: . . . they believed the individual grocer was the backbone of the nation and gave real and lasting service."—*Oxford Times*.

"Councillor Edward Curran, opposing the proposal (of a birth control clinic at Cardiff) as a man who had married young and was now the father of eight children, said that if the Corporation gave birth control their official blessing it would be a message to the people to take the line of least resistance. It would encourage people to neglect their responsibilities, and would take us back to the days of paganism."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"Aldershot Town Council decided to-day to spend £2,000 on providing a stand and dressing-room accommodation for the Aldershot Town Football Club. . . . Councillor W. Davis said that if they did not provide the needed accommodation the name of Aldershot would stink in the nostrils of every true sportsman."—*Star*.

"When a deputation arrived and they were not allowed in, a fight ensued, but after the meeting it was found that the wrong deputation had been repulsed. The delegates who were refused a hearing

were from residents of a housing estate, whereas the Committee had decided not to receive representatives of the Bristol branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement."—*The Times*.



"... THE WRONG DEPUTATION ..."

"The Education Committee was defended by its Chairman (Alderman F. Lee) and the Mayor, who is Chairman of the Primary and Post-Primary Sub-Committee, before which Miss Aylward appeared to state her case. They took the line that a breach of discipline could not for a moment be tolerated. There was more behind it, said Alderman Lee, than religious conviction. Miss Aylward had been defiant towards the Primary and Post-Primary Sub-Committee, and

during her student days 'had been in contact with Indians.' ”—*Manchester Guardian*.

“Councillor Thornton handed in the following notice of motion, which will be considered at the next meeting of the Water and Baths Committee: ‘That the Council prohibit the use of the two high spring-boards at Pickie bathing-place on Sundays.’ ”—*Co. Down Spectator*.

“Dr. —, who is the President of the Welwyn Garden City Health Association, is the senior medical officer of the Board of Education, and was Vice-Chairman of the Mental Deficiency Committee which sat for four years and produced the report which led to the appointment of the new Committee.”—*Welwyn Times*.

“Applications are invited for the post of Librarian of the Municipal Library. Salary offered, 35s. per week.”—*Cambrian News*.

“The Rev. W. Clarke, Vicar of Ridge, Herts, Chairman of the Council, said that he would be sorry to have a recreation-ground open in his parish when the church bells were calling people to worship. If churchwardens did their duty everybody could be compelled under an Act of Parliament of James I to attend morning service.”—*Evening Standard*.

“Councillor Griffin said the book (an outline for boys and girls and their parents) attacked married life, advocated birth control, and went so far as to say

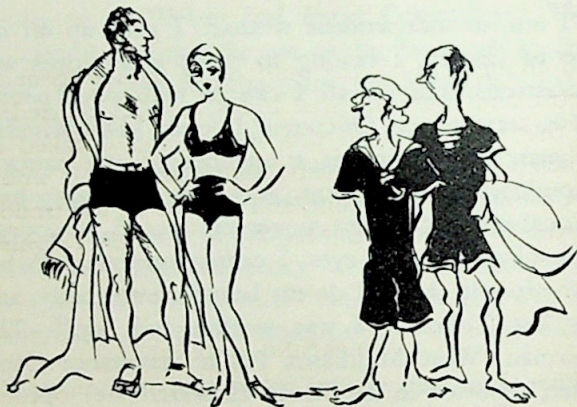
that the sexes would ultimately be bred as racehorses were bred. If he had read the book when he was eighteen years of age, he would not be a married man to-day."—*Liverpool Post and Mercury*.

"I am an independent woman. I give up all my time to charity. I belong to many committees and associations, and do all I can to help poor people and ex-service men. Of course, I do not know whether the man in question is a member of any national unemployment movement. Any man belonging to a national unemployment movement would, of course, damn himself in my eyes. I cannot understand what all the fuss is about. I do my best for everybody, and only last Thursday I was working all day."—The Chairman, West Middlesex Public Assistance Committee, reported in the *Sunday Express*.

"At to-morrow's meeting of Ealing Council a petition will be presented in favour of the Sunday use of the children's chutes and other amusement apparatus in the public parks. The Churches have objected to such use of the parks on Sundays. Among the critics was Mr. E. H. Brooks, a Methodist preacher and Council member who declared that Church people, by opposing these games, could 'Win such a victory as will make the Devil and the gates of hell shake.'"—*Evening Standard*.

"Triplets—two girls and a boy—were born during the week-end to the wife of Mr. James B. Smith, of

Billborngate, Durham, who is unemployed and already has eight children. The Mayor and Mayoress of Durham yesterday visited the Smiths' home and congratulated the parents."—*Daily Mirror*.



"... WHAT THE REGULATION COSTUME IS ..."

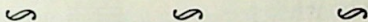
"Councillor A. H. Abbott, Chairman of the Beach Committee, said that a reply was sent to the effect that the Council's regulations did not permit sun bathing or sea bathing except in regulation costume, but 'it has been the policy of the Committee not to attempt to define exactly what the regulation costume is. We leave it to the good sense of the bathers.'"—Bournemouth Council Meeting reported in *The Times*.

"A resolution asking the Government to investigate the desirability of sterilizing the mentally unfit was adopted by Reading Town Council. Councillor

Gordon Palmer, objecting, said that both Isaac Newton and Lord Nelson were dull boys at school."—*Evening Standard*.

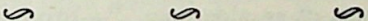
(The above extracts are reprinted from *This England*, by kind permission of Mr. Gerald Barry.)

"I thought of all the millions of money spent on electric and other artificial lights, and it occurred to me that if we pooled this money and installed an artificial sun to shine over London at night it would have a much better result, and save us all the trouble of artificially lighting our buildings."—*Daily Telegraph*.



AN ENTERPRISING COUNCIL!

When the Mayor (Sir Alfred Woodgate) opened the meeting of Kingston-on-Thames Town Council last night, Councillor J. W. Barker gave him a Fascist salute and remarked, "O.K. Chief."



"Another question by a member was: 'Would the Public Health Committee consider the advisability of giving expert advice on birth control, where it relates to parents in rooms and unemployed persons, as a precautionary measure against unhealthy and under-nourished children?' Councillor Knowlden (Chairman of the Committee) replied that, as the question raised ethical problems, it was hardly one for the Corporation

to deal with. His own opinion was that we mortals should not 'mess about with the Almighty's plans.' ”
—Report in *Surrey Comet* of debate in Kingston Town Council.



A NOVEL POST

“Lowestoft’s appointment of an inspector of sun-bathing is reported . . .”—*Daily Mail*.

Doubtless there was a record number of applications!



AN APT SIMILE

“Lt.-Col. Casserley said he had proved by experience that the life of wild animals in the jungle was much more terrifying and pitiful than in captivity. ‘When an animal is injured or wounded in the jungle it receives neither care nor attention,’ he added. ‘Instead, the vultures gather round it like councillors around the vacant seat of an alderman.’ ”—From a report in the *Daily Telegraph*.



The Council was still putting its house in order and he was anxious that they should not change horses crossing the stream, whilst there was much spade work to be done.—*Harrow Observer and Gazette*.

APPENDIX III

SUGGESTED EXAMINATION PAPER IN THE PRACTICE OF ADMINISTRATION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTION)

(Propounded by Lady Simon at an I.P.A.¹ Summer
Conference)

1. Arrange an agenda for any Committee so that a proposal to spend £3,000,000 will be passed without discussion. (The fewer the number of items, the greater the number of marks, but no marks will be given if the item is put at the end of a long agenda, for the candidate must assume that the official is playing fair with his Committee.)

2. Account—if you can—for the fact that a proposal which is hotly opposed by the majority of members at one Committee meeting is passed without comment later, with 90 per cent of the same members present.

3. Describe the physical conditions necessary before bringing a proposal for an increase of salaries to the Finance Committee.

4. Draw up a circular *either* explaining to parents that the school in their area is going to be closed and the children transferred to one some distance away, *or*

Explaining to tenants of a slum clearance area the steps that must be taken to ensure that they are not accompanied to their new homes by undesirable appendages. (In both cases it must be assumed that the circulars will be seen by the Press.)

¹ Institute of Public Administration (*not* India Pale Ale).

5. Do you think it advisable to allow

- (a) Smoking
- (b) Tea
- (c) Alcoholic refreshment

during Committee Meetings? If so, under what conditions? Would you distinguish between a meeting of a Committee and a Sub-Committee in this respect?

6. Do you think that comfortable chairs and good ventilation in a Council Chamber conduce to the despatch of business or otherwise?

7. How would you account for the fact that in the City of Cincinnati, where there is a city manager with extensive powers and an elected Council of seven, the same amount of time is occupied each month in the meetings of the Council as in an English County Borough with a Council of 144 members?

8. Describe in detail the steps to be taken, the time involved, and the number and rank of the officials concerned in inducing a reactionary Chairman of an Education Committee, who has always opposed the Raising of the School-Leaving Age, to propose a motion in its favour at a Regional Conference of Education Authorities, and to lead a deputation from the Conference to the President of the Board to urge the Government to introduce the necessary legislation. (In order to forestall any accusation of unfairness on the part of the candidate, the examiners wish to state that the above problem is not a hypothetical one, but has actually been solved recently in a northern city.)

